

Original Paper

An Interpretive Study of Six Major Models towards Translation Quality Assessments

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Abstract

Juliane House, Katherina Reiss, Malcolm Williams, Xinxiang Wu, Hong'an Li, Xianzhu Si and Sanning He have been recognized as the most renowned scholars who've done profound and systematic researches on translation quality assessment. Through the interpretive study of these six evaluation models, we can grasp the advancement and effectiveness of the researches of translation quality evaluation at home and abroad, and bring some inspiration and suggestions to the future human-centered as well as computer-centered translation quality evaluation researches on the basis of the apprehension of the limitations of the researches in existence.

Keywords

functional equivalence, text type, argumentation diagram, relevance theory, functional linguistics, relevance theory, translation quality assessment

Apparently, the most representative research achievements of overseas models for translation quality assessments include the ones constructed by Juliane House, Katherina Reiss and Malcolm Williams, while the scholars in China who have carried out comprehensive researches on translation quality assessments and achieved certain academic influence are mainly Xinxiang Wu, Hong'an Li, Xianzhu Si and Sanning He.

1. The TQA Models Overseas

The TQA Model Constructed by Juliane House In 1977, Juliane House put forward what is recognized as “the first translation quality assessment model with complete theory and demonstration” in her doctoral thesis, and revised it in 1997. The proposal of this model has attracted extensive attention in translation academic circles both at home and abroad. From the perspective of epistemology, House’s (1977) translation quality evaluation model is based on the understanding of the definition of translation. Her concept of “functional equivalence” in translation quality is derived from the concept of “equivalence” in translation, and “equivalence” here is regarded as an approximate value rather than an accurate number. From the perspective of methodology, based on the understanding of the essence of translation, that is, translation is not only a language activity, but also a cross-cultural social behavior and a cognitive process, House’s evaluation model widely absorbs the essence of the researches of comparative pragmatics, cross-cultural, cognitive and corpus, so as to provide an analytical framework and theoretical basis for the explanation of cultural differences in the process of language communication. It also systematically describes the cultural and contextual factors in language transformation, and reveals the translation process of adaption and variability based on the uncertainty and complexity of the dynamic changes of psychological and cognitive activities. From the perspective of content and form, inspired by Halliday’s linguistic thoughts, House’s model carries out the qualitative and quantitative analysis of vocabulary, syntax and discourse from the three dimensions of field, tenor and mode, on which contexts are reconstructed, tending not only to reflect the factors of interaction between original texts and target texts but also the restrictive relationships between the author, the translator and the reader.

House’s original translation quality assessment model has been revised to a comprehensive model. Its epistemological basis no longer rests on the fundamental understanding that translation is a language activity. In the process of clarifying the concept of translation, she realizes that translation is also a social behavior of cross-cultural communication and a cognitive process. Therefore, the theoretical source of House’s evaluation model extends from Halliday’s functional linguistics to many disciplines such as contrastive pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, corpus and cognitive translation. The evaluation parameters also transit from eight dimensions related to language users and language usage process to three dimensions of field, tenor and mode subordinated to register category. Moreover, the exemplification genre in this model changes from English and German business texts, children’s books

to company's annual reports, showing a diversity and reflecting a wide applicability of different text genres (see Table 1).

Table 1. Juliane House's Model

Pattern	Theoretical source	Dimension	Parameter	Illustrative genre
Original pattern	Functional linguistics, discourse analysis, stylistics	Language users, language usage	Region, time, social class, language media, degree of intervention, social function, social attitude and topic category	English- German business texts
Revised pattern	Register theory, genre theory	Field, tenor, mode	Vocabulary, syntax and discourse	English- German children's books
Comprehensive pattern	Contrastive pragmatics, intercultural communication, corpus, cognitive translation, globalization	Field, tenor, mode	Vocabulary, granularity of words, lexical field, Halliday's material, emotion and relationship process, social role relationship, social attitude, lexical or syntactic choice, media, theme rheme, discourse coherence	Annual reports of Century Lianhua International Company

House always believes that translation is a language activity, involving the dual constraints of the translated texts, the original texts, and of the author, the translator and the reader. Therefore, in the specific operation steps, she regards the elements of equivalence and deviation between the original text and the translated text as the standard to measure the quality of translation. Based on the understanding of the shortcomings of the first two models, in the latest evaluation model, she widely absorbed the theories and research results of other disciplines, reintegrated the parameters, removed the reference conditions with high similarities and added the evaluation factors endowed with high weight values, in a way that "context reconstruction based on the results of quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, and quantification (House, 2014, p. 110)", which makes the methodological system of translation quality assessment more reasonable and even more scientific.

The TQA Model Constructed by Katherine Reiss Katherine Reiss' (2004) translation quality assessment principle derives from the theory of language functions. Inspired by the three classifications of language functions and the text-type model proposed by German linguist Karl Bühler, She puts forward corresponding standards for evaluating translation quality according to different text types. According to Bühler, there are three main functions of language: the functions of description,

expression and appeal. These three functions are a step-by-step process. Firstly, the listener receives the objective facts described, reported or expressed through the function of description, then the opinions and emotions existing in the facts are directly fed back to the receiver's cognitive understanding system through certain language expression. Finally, the reader or listener perform and complete the corresponding tasks in the manner persuaded, ordered, required or affected. On this basis, Reiss puts forward three corresponding text types. The first text type is information texts that focus on the description of objective things and the internal logical analysis of language, which are usually non-literary texts, such as business documents, scientific and technological documents, news reports, etc.; The second text type is expressive texts that express the views and emotions of the author or speaker in the language form with rhetorical or aesthetic effect. It generally refers to literary works, such as novels, poetry, prose, etc.; the third text type is operational texts that pay attention to the effects of language communication. This kind of text often has a certain purpose, such as advertising texts, speeches, debating papers and so on. The relationship between Bühler's Language Function and Reiss' Text Type is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Katherina Reiss' Model

Theory of Language Function	Function	Category	Theory of Text Type	Type	Category	Evaluation criterion
Three Functions	Description	Content	Three Types	Informational texts	Non- literary works	Accuracy of information
	Expression	Rhetoric		Expressive texts	Literary works	Aesthetic effect
	Appeal	Behavior		Operational texts	Dialogue texts	Appealing effect

Reiss' text type model comprehensively considers the translation standards of each type of text, takes into account nonverbal factors and other subjective and objective factors, in particular takes the pragmatic function standards such as communication effect, emotion effect and practical effect of the text as the key elements to evaluate the quality of translation. He believes that in the evaluation, we should first classify the texts into different types, and then have an overall grasp of the linguistic, semantic and pragmatic effects of the texts according to different requirements and standards in specific translated texts. For example, when evaluating the news corpus of China Daily, the first step is to classify it as a content-oriented informative text, the function of whose language is to objectively describe things in order to accurately convey the content and information of the text. Therefore, the accuracy of information is the primary standard to evaluate its translation. The main reason why Reiss'

translation quality evaluation system is more objective lies in that he comprehensively considers the internal and external, the subjective and objective factors of language, and more importantly the operational mode of evaluation has strong pertinence, clear purposes and transparent steps.

The TQA Model Constructed by Malcolm Williams Similar to House's research experience, the prototype of Malcolm Williams(2004)'s translation quality assessment model was found in his doctoral thesis and compiled into a book *Translation Quality Assessment: An Argumentation-Centered Approach* in 2004, which was published by the University of Ottawa Press. The argumentation-entered model of translation quality evaluation takes the British philosopher Stephen Toulmin's argumentation analysis diagram as the evaluation criterion, and judges the quality of the translation by the extent to which the translated text reflects the argumentation diagram of the original text. Liang Bonan (2018, p. 101) expressed the elements of argumentation diagram-proposition, base, guarantee, backing, modification, refutation or exception or restriction in popular language as "thesis", "argument", "demonstrative logic", "rationale", "limitation" and "paradox". Its theoretical value lies in the fact that the relationship between various propositions, reasoning processes and argumentation information in the text makes a reasonable judgment on the quality of the translation. According to the types of rhetoric, Williams further optimized the debating components into debating diagrams, organizational structure relations, propositional functions, connectives, inference indicators, debating types, figures of speech and narrative strategies, and separated the core parameters and specific parameters suitable for the evaluation system. With ulterior motives, he selected four different types of English- French texts (on energy, statistics, crime and law). These texts are different in length and unmodified, including the texts of professional translators and general translators. The topics are both descriptive of objective facts and highly controversial, which proves that his model is effective and not affected by the argument of the topic. Williams' methods and strategies for evaluating translation quality are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Malcolm Williams' Model

Phase			Strategy
Original Text Analysis			Determine the basic
Argument diagram	Topic layout	Organizational relation	information of the original text
Translated Text Analysis			Determine the overall
Argument diagram	Topic layout	Organizational relation	layout of the translated text
Comparative Evaluation			Comparative
Argument diagram	Organizational relation	Propositional function/Conjunction/Inference Deixis	evaluation of the original text and the translated text

Argument type	Figure of speech	Narrative strategy	
Overall Evaluation			Overall translation quality

Williams divides the process of translation quality evaluation into four stages: The first step is to analyze the original text in order to determine the debating diagram, topic layout and organizational structure relationship of the original text, and then analyze the translated text in order to investigate the overall coherence of the translation, and determine to what extent it reflects the determined parameters of the original text. The second step is to make further analysis of the original text and the translated text according to the set argument parameters, and finally judge the overall translation quality.

On this basis, Williams proposed four standards to measure the quality of translation, namely the best standard, the information standard, the minimum standard and the substandard. The specific statement of each standard is shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Williams' Translation Quality Evaluation Criteria

Quality grade	Reference standard
Best standard	Reflect the composition of all argument diagrams / meet the requirements of all core parameters and selected specific parameters / no key errors
Information standard	Reflect the composition of all argumentation diagrams / meet the requirements of selected specific parameters / no key errors
Minimum standards	Reflect the elements of all argument diagrams / no key errors
substandard	Do not reflect any element of the argument diagrams / do not meet the requirements of at least one core parameter or specific parameter

Williams' operational mode and evaluation standard of translation quality evaluation take argumentation as the center. His model focuses on the analytical framework of text argumentation, reveals the reasoning, debating process and information exchange of the text from the relationship between the propositions in the text, and applies this strong logical thinking pattern to the activities of translation quality evaluation and the setting of translation quality assessment standards, which realizes the mutual unification of evaluation practice and evaluation standards.

2. The TQA Models in China

Xinxiang Wu, Hong'an Li, Xianzhu Si and Sanning He are the domestic scholars who have carried out comprehensive researches on translation quality assessment and its models, and have made some achievements and influence. *Wu* and *Li* are the earliest scholars to carry out translation quality

assessment research in China, and Si is the first expert to carry out systematic research on translation quality assessment in China.

The TQA Model Constructed by Xinxiang Wu and Hong'an Li Wu and Li's model for translation quality assessment takes the equivalent relationship between the translated text and the original text as the criterion, and holds that language has not only the deep and surface levels, but also the rhetorical level. Fundamentally speaking, the process of translation is to achieve equivalence in different degrees at these three levels. He proposed five micro levels of word, phrase, sentence, sentence group and chapter which are derived from the deep level, rhetorical level and surface level of language, and finally formed a translation quality evaluation system with 15 parameters (see Table 5).

Table 5. Translation Quality Evaluation System of Wu and Li

Language	Surface level	word/phrase/sentence/sentence group/chapter
	Rhetorical level	
	Deep level	

Based on their understanding of language generative grammar, Wu and Li constructed a quality evaluation system combining dynamic indexes and static ones. They believe that the transformation of equivalence at the word level should first pay attention to the phenomenon of similarities and differences in word meaning and the factors hidden behind. For instance, the word meaning characteristics of the two languages are restricted by the structural characteristics of words, and the exact meaning and rhetorical effect of words cannot be accurately judged from the surface structure. They largely depend on the collocation of words. Therefore, to deal with and grasp the meaning and style characteristics of the author's words is the key to realize the equivalence in each dynamic level.

The equivalence in phrase level must have a clear understanding of the constituent relationship and the internal laws of words in English and Chinese phrases. Most of the English phrases are modified. We should understand the collocation relationship between words as a whole, so as to find the word combination with the same meaning in the target language. However, there are a large number of four character dual phrases in Chinese expressions. They have a strong sense of rhythm and are often very beautiful and touching. When they are converted into English phrases, they should retain the original rhythm and linguistic features as much as possible.

The equivalence in sentence level regards translation as a process of language understanding and generation from the perspective of generative grammar. In the understanding stage of translation, in addition to examining the translator's ability to use the existing knowledge to predict and identify the unknown information hidden in the surface structure, the rhetorical structure and the deep structure of the sentence, we should also pay attention to whether the thought, style and cultural background of the original author have been accurately positioned in the translator's thinking. This is a process of

obtaining specific semantic intention from the specific context of the original sentence, and then through the transformation of various structural rules, such as replacement, displacement, deletion, etc., as well as repeated deliberation at the rhetorical level, and finally express the semantic intention of the sentence with language components in line with customary grammar to form the surface sentence of the target language. In this way, the generation process of the target language is completed. Thus in the process of translating sentences from deep structure, rhetorical structure to surface structure, we should pay special attention to the differences between English and Chinese sentences in sentence order and sentence pattern, and flexibly use various skills such as adjustment, deletion and conversion to achieve the maximum equivalence at the transformation of sentence level.

The equivalence in the level of sentence groups focuses on whether the theme rheme and its logical relationship in English sentence groups and Chinese sentence groups achieve equivalence to the greatest extent. In English, conjunctions or relative pronouns are usually used to combine multiple short sentences to form a complex long sentence, while in Chinese, the combination of continuous short sentences is common, and word order and sentence order are attached great importance. In translation, the theme rheme relationship including parallelism, continuity, concentration and intersection between sentences in the original sentence group should be maintained. The ultimate goal of sentence group equivalence is to find out whether the various logical relationships between the source sentence group and the target sentence group are equivalent.

The equivalence in text level seeks the degree of equivalence between the original text and the translated text in terms of style, layout, rhythm, language style and ideological image. The equivalence of a text in deep structure depends on the understanding of the ideological content and text image of the original work. The deeper and the more thorough the understanding, the greater the equivalence. Only when the rhetorical features of the author's language style are reflected in the translated text can the the equivalence in rhetorical structure be maximized. Sentences-making with words, the cohesion of paragraphs and the rhythm of the text are the problems that need to be considered and measured at the surface level of the text. Only when the maximum equivalence is achieved on the whole of the text, the equivalence at the micro level such as word, phrase, sentence and sentence group can have practical significance.

Wu and Li (1984, p. 10) took the equivalence between the original texts and the translated texts as the criterion to measure the quality of translation, and proposed to evaluate the equivalence of the translated texts from 15 equivalence parameters in static and dynamic level, and then processed those parameters with poor equivalence relationship, so as to improve the overall quality of translation. This assumption not only provides a certain reference for translation quality evaluation, but also brings some influence and role to translation teaching theory and translation teaching practice.

The TQA Model Constructed by Xianzhu Si In the field of translation quality assessment in China, Xianzhu Si is recognized as the first scholar to conduct systematic and comprehensive research. Si's

theory has fully absorbed the essence of House's translation quality assessment model, and has followed the translation quality assessment standard of equivalence or derivation in conceptual and interpersonal functions when translating the original texts into the target texts, and has proposed a bottom-up and top-down discourse analysis pattern in evaluation.

Based on a clear apprehension of the essence of translation, *Si*'s discourse analysis model derives the translation quality view of "a good translation is equivalent to the original text in the conceptual and interpersonal meaning of the text" from the translation view of "translation is to seek the equivalence between the original text and the translated text". Based on Halliday's functional linguistics, his model absorbs the conceptual function and the interpersonal function which play a role in evaluating the deviation and equivalence between the translated text and the original text from the theory of three functions of language, while the role of textual meaning is to assist the realization of the first two meanings. Taking the lexical grammatical system as the methodological tool, this pattern reveals, describes and judges whether the translated text deviates from the original text in conceptual or interpersonal meaning and how great the degree of deviation is through the analysis of the transitivity, the mood, the modality and the theme in the original text and the translated text.

Si adopts the systematic method of "bottom-up" and "top-down" discourse analysis, whose operation process mainly includes three steps:

Step 1: to find out the "Deviation" of conceptual meaning and interpersonal meaning between the translated text and the original text;

Step 2: to exclude the cases which has no impact on the quality of translation from the above-mentioned "Deviation";

Step 3: to count and integrate the "Deviation" in step 1 and step 2, and take the final results and revelations of "Deviation" as the basis for judging the "Equivalence" between the translated text and the original text.

Si's model takes the discourse as the subject, determines the evaluation parameters and standards, selects, counts and analyzes the main "defects" of the translation, and makes a reasonable description and natural interpretation of the translation phenomenon through the research methods of quantitative and qualitative, descriptive and regulative, micro and macro. It is based on judging the quality of the translated text from the text itself, but at the same time, it does not ignore the important role of external factors in the interpretation of the language characteristics of the text and the overall translation effect (2004, p. 46). Therefore, *Si* (2007, p. 137) further proposed that "when making an overall evaluation of the translation quality, we must also consider the type of the translated text", which is mainly reflected in the outline structure and in the embodiment style. The former should explain that when reconstructing the same genre in the context of the target language, it will make appropriate adjustments to the text structure of the original text, therefore, some clauses in the translation deviate from the function or meaning of the original text, while the latter reflects the different degrees of

function or meaning deviation in different text types, so as to determine the corresponding weight of each evaluation parameter that affects the quality of the translation.

The TQA Model Constructed by Sanning He *He's* understanding of translation and translation evaluation is influenced and inspired by Zijian Yang's apprehension of translation. From the perspective of relevance theory, he believes that "translation is a cross-language and cross-cultural communication activity with text reference, a cognitive and reasoning process that runs through human thinking, and its purpose is to constantly pursue the maximum convergence of meaning (2012, p. 27)", thus the degree of convergence in meaning between the original text and the translated text is regarded as the foothold for evaluating the quality of translation, and from the concept of "meaning", he puts forward three parameters for evaluating the quality of translation—namely language, entity and thinking. At the same time, he thinks that these three parameters are closely related to people, because language must be attached to people in order to be used, that is, on the basis of understanding the object and meaning support (i.e., entity), man obtains his view, attitude and evaluation (i.e., thinking) of the objective world.

Translation is realized through written language. Therefore, how to take language as the primary parameter of translation evaluation is also the basis of translation quality assessment. In terms of language parameters, *He* takes three levels into account: vocabulary, grammar and discourse, and further discussed each level, as well as the language evaluation contents referred to in the evaluation of Chinese-English translation and English-Chinese translation. According to *He*, in the evaluation process of Chinese-English translation, we should take the lexical meaning collocation, rhetorical style, sentence structure of the declarative, interrogative, long and short sentences, and textual cohesion and coherence as the specific contents of the evaluation, in order to evaluate the language usage of English translation in the respects of semantic connotation, syntactic structure and communicative function, while in the evaluation of English-Chinese translation, we should depend on the word meaning, the language rules of semantic structure, the expression habits, the cohesion and coherence of the text to examine the accurateness of word selection, the appropriateness of thinking order and logic, and also the vivid expression of the text. In terms of substantive parameters, *He* takes text factors as the main content, including register (tenor, mode and field), text type (informative, expressive and appealing) and text function (referential, expressive, calling, greeting etc.), in order to consider the overall characteristics of the text from various relations, genres and functions. The content of evaluation in thinking parameter is based on the thinking content of the original author, the translator and the target reader. The different thinking patterns directly affect the quality of translation, or whether the aesthetic effect of the text is reflected to the greatest extent. Especially in the evaluation of translation quality, we should pay attention to whether the translator can maximize the convergence of the original thinking pattern in the target language. According to the mode, characteristics and style of thinking, we are supposed to verify the embodiment of the effect in the translated text from the aspects of stylistic

characteristics, rhetorical devices, ideological and artistic characteristics.

He's translation quality evaluation parameters are based on the essence of translation, starting with the support of translation (language and text) and the embodiment of translation (thinking and effect), combined with the actual use of English and Chinese, to find the real reasons restricting translation, so as to comprehensively consider various factors affecting the quality of translation. The actual operational process of the model is as follows: firstly, comprehensively analyze the evaluation contents of the language parameter, of the entity parameter and of the thinking parameter between the original text and the translated text respectively; secondly, compare the differences of the evaluation contents between the original text and the translated text; finally, make a descriptive evaluation of the quality of the translation. *He* firmly believes that only by comprehensively considering the three parameters of language, entity, thinking, and highlighting the key points of evaluation, can the translation be evaluated most thoroughly (2009, p. 136).

3. Findings

The researches on the evaluation model of translation quality at home and abroad have made some great achievements and progress, which has positive practical significance for the in-depth study and discussion of translation and translation quality. However, it needs to be further improved. From the current research results, there are mainly the following matters:

Incompatibility of theoretical research and empirical research Most of the studies on translation quality assessment models stay at the level of theoretical construction, with only a few studies comprehensively considering the necessity of empirical analysis, and do not apply the model to the actual assessment analysis of the translated text, as well as lacking verification of the feasibility of the model in the specific operational process.

Separation of subjective evaluation and objective evaluation In the existing translation quality evaluation models, there are mainly two methods: descriptive evaluation and ranking evaluation. The former is human-centered, which is mainly the subjective comparison and judgment of translation results according to the evaluation criteria and existing cognitive experience system, while the latter mainly relies on the parameters and weights set by the system to objectively score the translation results, and then sort or grade them, which is common in automatic evaluation.

Disintegration of evaluation criteria and evaluation parameters Domestic and foreign translation quality assessment experts mostly start with the essence of translation and put forward the corresponding translation quality assessment standards. However, due to their different understanding of translation and translation process, the evaluation standards and parameters are in the state of diversity and prosperity.

Individuality of each evaluation model The existing evaluation models have different theoretical bases and foundations, and the analytical frameworks of evaluating the quality of translation have their own

characteristics. For example, House's evaluation model draws on the concept of register in Halliday's systematic functional linguistics, and Reiss' evaluation model is influenced by Buller's text type theory, while Williams constructed the argumentation theory model of translation quality evaluation on the basis of text argumentation theory, and Sanning He evaluated the quality of translation from the perspective of relevance theory.

4. Expectations

In the human-centered artificial evaluation model, due to the different cognitive thinking, cultural and knowledge background of the evaluators, they often show great differences in evaluating the same translation. Therefore, it is difficult to be completely objective. However, the advantage of manual evaluation model is that people, as evaluators, have inherent logical reasoning ability, cognitive ability and creative ability, and can interpret and judge the intuitive texts in an all-round way in combination with the long-term accumulated comprehensive knowledge, cultural knowledge, professional ability and emotional quality. While the automatic evaluation model with computer program as the main body, no matter how scientific its design is, in the actual translation quality evaluation, it is impossible to make the evaluation process and results perfect, in that the computer itself does not have the ability of cognition, learning, thinking, judgment, reasoning and even emotion, it can not independently understand and interpret the translation like human beings. However, the automatic evaluation technology of computer system can provide appropriate quantitative evaluation statistics, so that the evaluation results have objective basis and are persuasive to a certain extent. Therefore, in the computer-based automatic evaluation, we can learn from the theory and method of manual evaluation model to realize the consistency and accuracy of objective data and subjective facts.

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