

Research on Developing a Translation Quality Model for Professional Translation Education

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In 1999, a conference themed “Translation Quality” was held in Leipzig, Germany. It served as a signal of opening up a new chapter in the field of translation studies that had been centered on the longstanding comparison/analysis of ST and TT based on linguistic approaches and translation strategies. More than 10 years later, however, systemic and quantifiable criteria to evaluate translation quality are still missing: the majority of translation evaluations are based on the evaluators’ personal criteria rather than on objective standards. Many of the scholars who have pointed out such subjectivity in evaluation have cited personal viewpoints or intuition as elements undermining objectivity. Personal viewpoints may influence the assessor’s answer to the question, “what should be

regarded as ‘good’ translation?” a constantly reoccurring debate that dates back as far as the birth of translation studies, as does the definition or concept of translation competence needed to produce ‘good’ translations. No person, who has ever been involved in translation evaluation, could deny that such differences in viewpoints has made translation evaluation dependent on subjective criteria.

In order to produce a ‘good’ translation, it is necessary to accurately identify and build the required competence, a process which requires clear measurements that make it possible to judge that a translation is good or poor. This leads to the conclusion that ‘good translation’ requires a combination of three elements, ‘production-competence (i.e. training)-evaluation.’ However, as mentioned afore, Korea’s numerous translation academies and organizations that produce and consume translations lack a clear and objective translation evaluation model that would enable effective evaluation of translations. As mentioned at the beginning, the most critical element in translation evaluation is keeping the subjectivity of the evaluator to the minimum. Mossop (1989: 55) said, “‘objective’ translation evaluation usually refers to an evaluation system that will let different evaluators arrive at similar conclusions.” In other words, objective evaluation indispensably necessitates well-defined ‘criteria’ and ‘process’. Otherwise, the act of evaluation will depend on the evaluator’s personal tastes or the preconception that has involuntarily settled down in his/her head, resulting in a haphazard evaluation or a bureaucratic, extremely rigid, and subjective conclusion (Darwish, 1999/2001:2).

The purpose of this research is first, to apply existing evaluation models to translations produced by students taking professional translation courses to find out their limitations and weaknesses; second, to identify conditions to be met by an evaluation model that,

to its best, takes into account the objectives and pedagogical content of translation programs in graduate schools of interpretation and translation as well as linguistic similarities of Korean and Japanese; and third, to build and present a translation evaluation model that best suits the aforementioned conditions. The first step was to take a close look at several existing evaluation models.

Limitations and the effectiveness of different evaluation systems were identifiable through the process of analyzing different models. Among the numerous existing translation evaluation systems, one that best suited the objectives and pedagogical content of graduate schools of interpretation and translation and the Korean-Japanese language pair, was selected and applied to graduate students' translations as part of the first experiment. The "1st Translation Evaluation Model" was built through an in-depth analysis of Japan's TES (Translation Evaluation System), a typical point deduction mechanism based on translation errors, which was followed by the deletion, adjustment, and integration of elements that would not contribute to achieving the goal of the research. The "1st Translation Evaluation Model," however, turned out to have many weaknesses when actually applied to students' translations. To solve the issues, the "2nd Translation Evaluation Model" was established by modifying the previous model. The second version, yet again, revealed critical problems of elements being too minute and heavy reliance on simple point deduction mechanism. As a result, the first experiment was contained to quantifying major translation errors from students' translations and identifying limitations of existing translation evaluation mechanisms.

Against this backdrop, the second experiment was focused on pushing back the limits of existing evaluation systems when analyzing students' translations in an elaborate manner, and by analyzing and

categorizing every error evaluation type shown in translations, the “3rd Translation Evaluation Model” was finalized. In the process, an in-depth analysis was conducted on different scholars’ work on evaluation and supervision criteria regarding TQA Practices besides translation evaluation models that had been or were still in use. This analysis served as the stepping stone for categorizing types of translation errors.

Finally, in order to apply the evaluation model to actual translation evaluation and find out different issues revealed in the process, instructors teaching translation at different interpretation and translation academies in Korea were asked to evaluate translations using the evaluation system, and, based on the scores given by evaluators, a statistical analysis was carried out to measure inter-rater reliability, and proved the effectiveness of the evaluation model. As argued by many scholars, it may be almost impossible to create an evaluation system that can unanimously satisfy or be accepted by all evaluators, as each of them differs in terms of subjectivity or taste. Furthermore, as “translation is an intellectual product and, as such, is a complex, heterogeneous one, not a physical unit,” as Williams (2009:7) argues, it is de facto impossible to build an evaluation system that would meet all the requirements. It is hoped, however, that the evaluation model created in this study can serve as, and contribute to, a starting point of an objective and systemic evaluation conducted in Korea, in particular in institutions providing that provide professional translation courses, such as graduate schools of interpretation and translation.