

## Mapping out the Terminology for Judging Quality in Various Translation Practices: A Key Disciplinary Desideratum



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### Abstract

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Translation quality is a central issue in the translation profession as well as translation education and training and is one of the utmost controversial topics in translation studies today. The terms and concepts used in discussing the process of judging translation quality in its various practices and contexts are rather confused by scholars and practitioners in the field. Perhaps, the prime example of such confusion is the interchangeable use of the terms, “evaluation” and “assessment.” Acknowledging the complexity and importance of defining these notions, a shared emphasis is found in the literature on defining and assessing quality in the context of specific situations. In fact, the lack of a universal, unified specialized terminology for judging translations is urging the need to standardize assessment terminology in order to reach a common understanding of quality standards demanded in both academic and professional settings. In order to differentiate among various practices, translation terminology is gradually being evolved. To date, efforts have been made to clarify this terminology and to identify and define different types of translation quality assessment procedures. Through a systematic review of the literature at hand, the present paper is an attempt to map out the terminology for judging quality in various translation practices as a key disciplinary desideratum.

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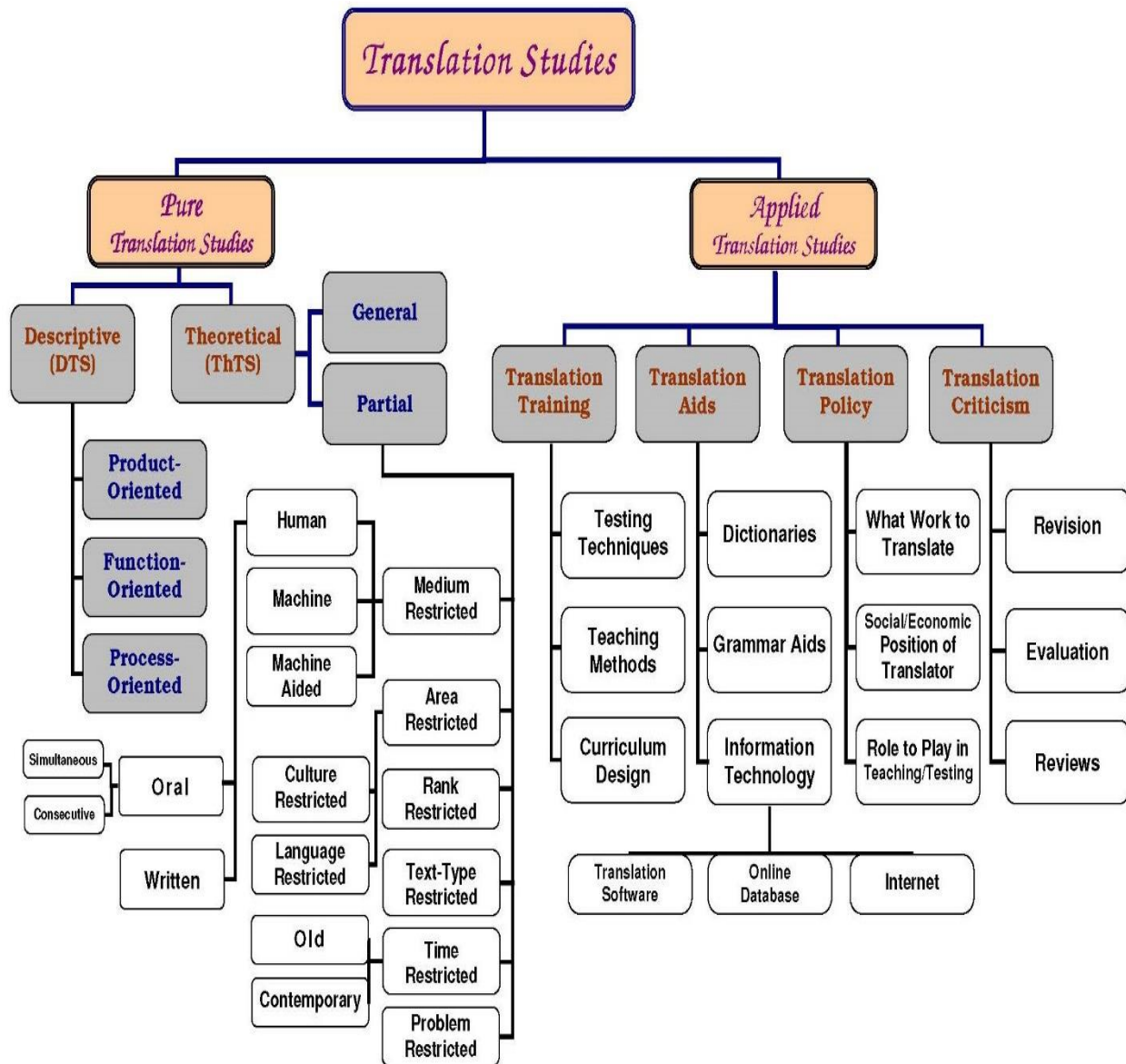
## Introduction

### Position in the Field

Translation quality is a central issue in the translation profession as well as translation training and one of the utmost controversial topics in translation studies today; in fact, "the relevance of, and justification for, TQA (translation quality assessment) is stronger than ever" (Williams, 2001, p.327). At present, due to a large body of research and scholarship which can be found on translation in general and translation quality in specific, great incredible advances have also been made in the field of evaluation and assessment in general and translation evaluation and translation quality assessment in particular. Among these, one may refer to Drugan (2013); Honig (1998a, 1998b); House (1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2013); Huertas-Barros et al. (2019); Moorkens et al. (2018); Munday (2012); Sainz, (1994); Schaffner (1998a, 1998b, 1998c); Schiaffino and Zearo, (2005); Secara (2005); Sun (2020); Tsagari, and Van Deemter (2013); Williams (1989, 2001, 2004); Waddington (2000a, 2000b, 2001).

Judging the translation quality is one of the most problematic areas of translation, having been referred to as a "great stumbling block" (Bassnett, 2013, p. 20), "assessment chaos" (Williams, 2004, p. xiv), a "thorny issue" (Darwish, 2010, p. 99) and a "most wretched question" (Malmkjaer, 1998, p. 70) in the literature at hand (Sembiring, 2015). Translation evaluation schemes are also regarded as "dead ducks" (McAlester, 2003, p. 46) or "unsystematic, hit-and-miss methods" (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 198).

As the founding statement of work in the field of Translation Studies, Holmes's (1988a/2000) seminal paper (first written in August 1972) entitled "The name and nature of translation studies" put forward an overall framework, describing what this interdisciplinary field covers. The framework has two major areas: "pure" and "applied". Under the applied branch come four areas: *translation training*, the sub-branches of which are curriculum design, teaching evaluation methods and testing techniques encompassing the evaluation of translations; *translation aids* (such as dictionaries, grammars, IT application; *translation criticism* (including the grading of student translations), revision and reviews; and *translation policy*, the place of translation in society as well as in language teaching and learning curriculum. Figure 1 summarizes the branches of translation studies:

**Figure 1***Holmes' Map of Translation Studies (Toury, 1995, p.10)*

The main merit of Holmes's map is that it allows a clarification on the various frequently-confused domains and areas of translation studies, and shows the position of each discipline in relation to translation studies as well as to other disciplines of the field. Obviously, for the process of judging the quality in translation, the endeavor is to investigate the subject matter of the

branches "testing techniques," "evaluation of translations" and "translation criticism", as common practices in academic as well as in professional contexts.

### **Translation Quality**

According to Fawcett (1981, p. 142), "Translation quality assessment proceeds according to the lordly, but completely unexplained, the whimsy of 'It doesn't sound right.'" Quality is the underlying concept or building block of all concerns with translation: in debates on translation as a finished product and translating as a process or activity, "the question of quality has always been one of top priority" (Schaffner, 1998a, p. 1). The ultimate aim of each and every translation activity is repeatedly acknowledged to produce a good translation. Thus, "What is a good translation?" should be "one of the most important questions to be asked in connection with a translation" (House, 2001a, p.127). In other words, the simple question 'how is it known when a translation is good' lies at the heart of all discussions with translation criticism and evaluation. Yet, "It is notoriously difficult to say why, or even whether, something is a good translation" (Halliday, 2001, p.14). Nida (1969) also asserted that there will always be a variety of valid answers to the question, 'Is this a good translation?' In the same way, Darwish (2001) argued that like in other knowledge domains, quality in translation means different things to different people because researchers and translation users alike have different viewpoints of quality based on the translation model, perspectives, or set of heuristics they adopt in evaluating quality.

Surprisingly enough, however, the concept of quality is rarely specified explicitly or even articulated at all in the literature at hand: "Astonishingly, a survey of the translation literature ... quickly reveals a striking absence of any serious discussion of quality in translation. No index entries for quality appear in these publications, which can only be indicative of the space translation quality occupies in the debate" (Darwish, 2001, p. 4) except for House (1997) and Schaffner (1998). In fact, it is still to come to a universal consensus over what translation quality means. Throughout translation studies, theorists have attempted to define it "on the basis of a theory of translation and translation criticism" from various perspectives (House, 2001a, p.127). In effect, some translation scholars, like Schaffner (1998a), have preferred to speak of '(functionally) appropriate' or of '(pragmatically) adequate' translation instead of the ambiguous modifier 'good'.

In the translation-teaching environment, the whole question of how to evaluate; i.e., how to place a numerical value on a translated text is one that poses a challenge to those responsible for training translators. The attempt to measure the quality of a translation raises important questions addressing the heart of any theory of translation; i.e., the crucial question of the nature of translation or, more specifically, the nature of the relationship between a source text and its translation. The other major issue in this regard is the relationship between features in the text itself and how they are perceived; in this sense, translation quality is relative. Not least does it lead us into an area where the concept of "translation" itself becomes problematic? In short, any attempt to judge a translation presupposes the existence of some criteria, whether objective or subjective, and these criteria further presuppose a theory of translation. In the words of House (1997, p.1), "Translation quality evaluation presupposes a theory of translation. Thus, different views of translation itself lead to different concepts of translation quality," that go hand in hand with "different ways of assessing it." In sum, as Darwish (2001, p.5) has argued,

Translation quality is predicated on the notion that translation is not a haphazard activity. It is rather a rational, objective-driven, result-focused process that yields a product that meets a set of specifications, implicit or explicit. If a translation is a haphazard activity, it falls outside the scope of quality assurance principles that are based on the rationality of process and consciousness of decision-making.

### **Why Evaluating Translation Quality Matters**

According to Williams (2001, p.327), with the advent of globalization and the coming of age of translation as part of the language industry,

The reasons for people's interest in translation quality have, of course, evolved: where they were once primarily aesthetic, religious, and political, they are now primarily professional and administrative (e.g., evaluation of students) and economic and legal (e.g., pre-delivery quality control/assurance; post-delivery assessment to ensure that terms of the contract have been met by supplier).

The main question is why it is necessary to evaluate translation quality. One possible answer is because it has the distinction of being one that interests a broad range of practitioners, researchers, and organizations, whether their focus is on academic or professional translation. Arguing that

what is necessary now is informed and professional translation quality testing and evaluation, Honig (1998b, p.15) defined in detail such a broad range:

- Users need it because they want to know whether they can trust the translators and rely on the quality of their products.
- Professional translators need it because there are so many amateur translators who work for very little money that professional translators will only be able to sell their products if there is some proof of the superior quality of their work.
- Translatological research needs it because if it does not want to become academic and marginal in the eyes of practicing translators it must establish criteria for quality control and assessment.
- Trainee translators need it because otherwise, they will not know how to systematically improve the quality of their work.

This makes translation quality testing and evaluation a central issue in university training courses. The way it is taught and carried out radiates into all aspects of the practice and theory of translation. The testing method used affects more than the simple student-teacher relationship in a translation classroom. In training courses,

- It establishes or undermines the authority of the lecturer/trainer;
- motivates or discourages the student/trainee;
- It implicitly defines the didactic approach to translator-training;
- It sets the standards for what (future generations of) translators and translation users will understand by a 'good' translation.
- It is without some means to assess the quality of translation, it is not possible to improve translation quality, nor is it possible to know if the translation quality is good; and, if it is good, how to keep it that way.

Anyhow, it is universally acknowledged that translation evaluation is a laborious process because of its variety of uses and users (Amiri Shalforoosh & Heidari Tabrizi, 2018; Azin & Heidari Tabrizi, 2016; Elekaei et al., 2016; Heidari Tabrizi, 2008, 2021, in press; Heidari Tabrizi & Pezeshki, (2015); Heidari Tabrizi et al., 2008; Jalalpour & Heidari Tabrizi, 2017; Karimi et al.,

2016; Khalouzadeh et al., 2013; Moeinifard et al., 2014; Montazer & Chalak, 2017; Shahsavarzadeh & Heidari Tabrizi, 2020; Valipoor et al., 2019; Yazdani et al., 2020).

### **Translation Evaluation Models**

From time immemorial, the notion of evaluating translation has circulated in translation theory. Yet, very little of ‘cookbook’ or ‘mathematics’ nature can be passed on about evaluating translation quality. In fact, evaluation of a translated text as a finished product has often been and even still is accused of being a subjective process. That’s true: Measuring translation quality is a subjective process that relies highly on human judgments. In other words, the main difficulty associated with translation evaluation is that it is often a very subjective exercise, even though there is little room for subjectivity in the translation classroom.

More specifically, the area of translation quality assessment is academically one "where a more expert writer (a marker of a translation examination or a reviser of a professional translation) addresses a less expert reader (usually a candidate for an examination or a junior professional translator)" (Munday, 2016, p.50). However, according to Zequan (2003), what should be held as *the* criterion for translation quality assessment has constituted the core and co-current concern of all long debates in translation studies throughout history. The problems standing in the way of consensus and coherence in TQA are legion, ranging from the debate over whether and how to factor in conditions of production and difficulty of a source text to the degree of importance placed on target-language defects (Williams, 2001).

As a matter of fact, over the last twenty years, a large number of approaches have been proposed for the evaluation of translations (see for a more detailed recent critical account House, 1997, 2001). In their emphasis on specific aspects of the translation process and their degree of differentiation, they vary considerably. With regard to fundamental principles, however, there is broad agreement on the basic general criteria by which the efficacy of translations is to be judged. In other words, the main problem seems to reside in how to define quality or what measure should be used for the quality of a translation. In fact, different approaches define a good translation differently and apply different criteria for judging translation quality.

At this juncture, examination of the specifics of actual translation quality evaluation approaches serves to highlight what progress has been made in resolving related issues in the discipline and what areas still require improvement. Williams and Chesterman (2002) distinguish three general approaches to translation quality evaluation. First, the source-oriented ones use measuring instruments (including House, 1997, Schaffner, 1998c) which define the required equivalence and then try to classify different kinds of deviations from this equivalence. The second category (including Toury, 1995, Leuven-Zwart, 1990) is oriented toward the target language in the sense that here the main focus is to assess the translation's degree of naturalness. The third approach focuses on examining translation effects on the audience. Examples include Fawcett (2000), Maier (1998), and Vermeer (1996).

In brief, the two central issues in translation evaluation are what is to be evaluated and how this is to be evaluated. The existing models and approaches in the literature at hand, whether they have actually been put into practice or have merely been proposed theoretically, all focus on these two aspects. Besides, they can be classified based on having one feature in common: "Categorization of errors lies at the heart of each approach" (Williams, 2001, p.329). Of course, their concept of the categorization differs, according to whether they incorporate qualitative or quantitative measurement. Accordingly, in the tradition of translation studies, the models of translation evaluation can be divided into two schools: Models with quantitative dimensions (i.e., completeness of message transfer) versus models considering the qualitative aspects (i.e., accuracy). Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the existing models of translation evaluation:

**Table 1**

*An overview of existing translation evaluation models*

<b>Features</b> <b>Type</b>	<b>Label</b>	<b>Merits</b>	<b>Demerits</b>	<b>Scoring Criteria</b>
<b>Quantitative Models</b>	<b>Error-annotated</b>	1. Examine/source-text centered 2. Errors' quantifiability	1. Subjectivity 2. Focusing on negative quality 3. Excluding macrostructures	1. Microstructures 2. Error typology 3. Error gravity
	<b>Positive</b>	1. Success-based 2. Focusing on right solutions	1. Impracticality 2. Not fully-fledged yet	1. Translation processes 2. Potential solutions



<b>Qualitative Models</b>	<b>Mentalist</b>	1. Meaning relativity 2. Fast evaluation of a large number of translations	1. Being atheoretical 2. Subjectivity 3. No operational definitions for quality	1. Impressions on the evaluator(s) 2. Global judgments
	<b>Response-based</b>	1. Equivalence 2. Communicatively-oriented	1. Dismissing human mind 2. Ignoring source text	1. Reactions to the translation
	<b>Text-based</b>	1. Including context/ macrostructures 2. Multi-stages for translation evaluation	1. Programmatic in nature 2. Impracticality	1. Source text analysis 2. Sampling 3. Natives' metaling. judgments
	<b>Functional</b>	1. User-centered 2. Target text not being tied to source text 'slavishly'	1. No operational definition for Skopos 2. Inadequacy for bidirectionality	1. Skopos 2. Communicative acceptability
	<b>Pragmatic</b>	1. Descriptive/ explanatory 2. Incorporating social factors	1. Refusing to pass final judgments 2. Operationally-defined concepts	1. Functional, pragmatic equivalence

A cursory, yet selective, review of evaluation methods and procedures for translation quality by Williams (2001) highlights the following limitations:

- Norm-based models are for the most part micro-textual. They are applied to short passages or even sentences.
- Criterion-referenced models (e.g. Nord, House) are based on discourse and full-text analysis and factors in the function and purpose of the text.
- None of the textological models proposes clearly defined overall quality or tolerance levels. House refuses to pass overall judgments, and Nord's assessments are not related to a measurable scale of values.

According to Williams (2001), none of the non-quantitative models can offer a cogent acceptability threshold for evaluating translation quality either, precisely because it does not propose error weighting and quantification for individual texts. To him, what is needed is an

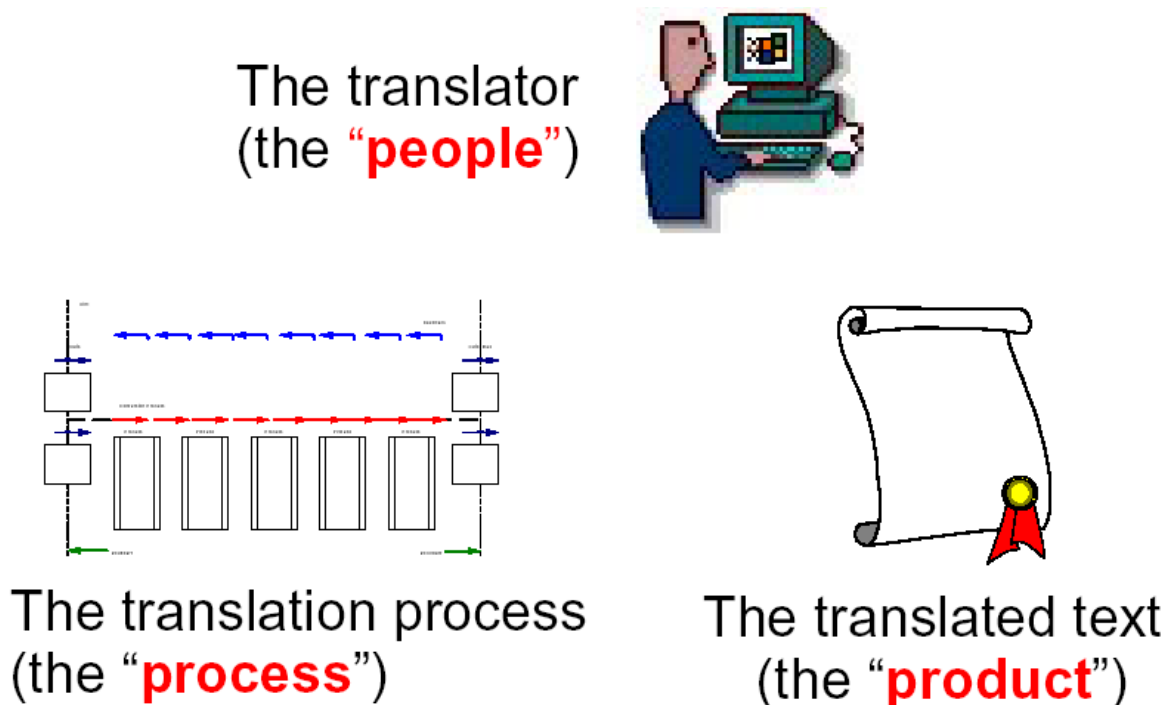
approach that combines the quantitative and textological dimensions, along the lines proposed by Bensoussan and Rosenhouse (1990) and Larose (1987, 1998).

### Translation Evaluative Practices: Different Uses and Users

In one aspect, translation quality is a direct result of the translation process, which cannot be separated from the principal actor in the process, namely the translator. Subsequently, translator competence is always called into question whenever the quality of the translation product is questioned. Yet, for the main part, translation researchers and educators have treated the quality of the translation product, the translation process, and the translator competence as discrete entities. In fact, it is only recently that the focus has shifted from the translation product (always referred to as ‘translation’) to the translation process (increasingly used term ‘translating’) albeit in a timid and limited fashion and with more obscure views and perspectives on what constitutes a process. To put it bluntly, there seems to be some serious confusion among researchers and analysts at least about the process, procedure, and methodology (Darwish, 1998, 2001).

#### Figure 2

*Factors Contributing to Translation Quality (Schiaffino & Zearo, 2005)*



Thus, it is generally accepted by now that translation is tripartite comprising the 'people', the 'process', and the 'product' (Figure 2). The trouble is that these three components are all right: Translation *is* a product, a process, and a service offered by a translator. That is why measuring the quality of a translation is much more complicated, especially if it is to be reliable and objective.

Interestingly enough, in translation discipline as an academic inquiry, the quality judgment is limited just to the evaluation of the text translated; i.e., the product of the translation process, under test conditions was investigated and discussed. The evaluation methods practiced for the other two, though of crucial importance in translation quality, were included. Another justification for limiting the scope of the study to the translation as a product is that, in the words of Wagner, “in fact most industrial quality standards are process-oriented” (Chesterman & Wagner, 2002, p. 84) whereas as Chesterman argued, “in the academic field, on the other hand, most of the work on translation quality has been on the product” (p.88). Likewise, Darwish (1995) asserts that whereas a shift from product-oriented to process-oriented models has been observed in translator training, translation tests, especially those run by teachers in academic bodies, remain product-oriented. They seek to establish whether a translation trainee is qualified to pass a course or not. This is validated largely by evaluating a snapshot of the translation product of a timed test; in other words, the outcome of the translation process. It is also of cardinal importance that judging the quality of translations is related to the many different purposes that a given translation may serve and the wide variety of contexts and circumstances where translation can occur.

The judgment itself fulfills a purpose. It may serve to examine a translator’s qualification for a particular translation job, to assess whether he or she has satisfied the requirements for a specific translation task, to inform a translation student about his or her progress, to inform the reader about the quality of the translation of a new work of fiction, etc. A judgment is also oriented towards a prospective addressee. It will look different depending on whether it targets professional translators, the audience of the target text, clients, or translation students (Lauscher, 2000. p.163).

In practice, the contexts in which translation quality judgment takes place can be divided into two broad categories: academic versus non-academic (often referred to as translation industry). Campbell and Hale (2003) have divided works on assessment/evaluation of translation into two broad categories of assessment purpose: accreditation and pedagogy, reflecting the two broad

constituencies of recruitment and training. Considering both academic translation programs and the translation industry, Brunette (2000) identified the types of evaluation procedures used in the two settings and distinguishes five assessment procedures for quality testing:

(a) *Didactic Revision*, conducted by translator trainers, focusing on the formative or summative evaluation of texts translated, and intended as a careful comparison of source and target texts with the aim of improving translator's skills;

(b) *Translation Quality Assessment (TQA)*, conducted by translation managers, related to management techniques and performed over a portion of the translated text by concentrating on its quality for productivity purposes utilizing a predefined checklist;

(c) *quality control*, conducted by revisers, an instrument for management purposes ensuring the compliance of the final translation; i.e. translation as a product, with a set of requirements, norms, and criteria established in advance;

(d) *Pragmatic Revision*, usually performed by an individual reviser who does not have contact with the translator and whose aim is to improve the final version; and

(e) *Fresh Look*, conducted by supposedly first readers, considers the translation as an independent coherent, and cohesive unit that has to conform to target readers' expectations.

To these five evaluation procedures used in academic and professional translation environments, one can add a fully academic-oriented practice focusing on just one aspect of Brunette's didactic revision: pedagogical evaluation, a kind of diagnostic test or task. This kind of evaluation, mainly concerned with the translation process, helps translator trainers/evaluators provide objective and constructive feedback to the trainees in a translation classroom (Bowker, 2000). It is focused on the educational function and aims at eliciting information useful to the translation students rather than testing them (Kim, 2004). According to Hatim and Mason (1997), “Even within what has been published on the subject of evaluation, one must distinguish between the activities of assessing the quality of translations, translation criticism and translation quality control on the one hand and those of assessing performance on the other” (p.197). On the whole, most research into assessment in translation only concentrates on one area— criticism of translations of literary and sacred texts—and other areas are just ignored. In fact, this field of research includes two other areas as well, each with its own characteristics (in terms of objects,

types, functions, aims, and means of assessment): assessment of professionals at work and assessment of trainee translators (Martinez Melis & Hurtado, 2001).

Terms and concepts used in discussing the process of judging translation quality in its various practices and contexts are rather confused by scholars and practitioners in the field. Perhaps, the prime example of such confusion is the interchangeable use of the terms “evaluation” and “assessment.” Acknowledging the complexity and importance of defining these notions, a shared emphasis is found in the literature on defining and assessing quality in the context of specific situations. In fact, the lack of a universal, unified specialized terminology for judging translations is urging the need to standardize assessment terminology in order to reach a common understanding of quality standards demanded in both academic and professional settings. In order to differentiate among various practices, translation terminology is gradually being evolved. To date, efforts have been made to clarify this terminology and to identify and define different types of translation quality assessment procedures. Through a systematic review of the literature at hand, the present paper aimed at mapping out the terminology for judging quality in various translation practices as a key disciplinary desideratum.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Research on testing and judging translation quality (e. g. Arango-Keeth & Koby, 2003) has revealed that "the terms and concepts used in discussing this process are somewhat confused hence the need to map out the terminology used in various evaluative practices" (Brunette, 2000, p.169). Perhaps, the prime example of such confusion is the interchangeable use of the terms, “evaluation” and “assessment.” This is in line with Honig (1998b), "Obviously, many teachers and lecturers are not aware of the fact that there is such a wide variety of evaluation scenarios and applied criteria (p.29)." Likewise, Newmark (2003, p.65) asserts that "... examination boards and examiners are not aware of the literature."

In a special issue of *The Translator* dedicated to "Evaluation and Translation", Maier (2000), the guest-editor, has written perceptively about various uses and discussions of the terms 'value' and 'quality' and about the instability of such notions in relation to translation. Asserting that determining the value of a translation is considered by some as evaluation and by others as assessment, she points out that these two terms can sometimes be considered synonymous: "Some

refer to this determination as evaluation, others use assessment; and many, if not most, use the two interchangeably, often without indications that they consider the terms synonymous” (Maier, 2000, p.137). Acknowledging the complexity and importance of defining these notions, she observed, "one sees a shared emphasis on defining and assessing quality in the context of specific situations, especially pedagogical ones" (Maier, 2000, p.140).

In brief, the lack of a universal, unified specialized terminology for judging translations is urging the need to standardize assessment terminology in order to reach a common understanding of quality standards demanded in both academic and professional settings. However, the field of translation quality is still a developing field, perhaps not surprising since the field of translation evaluation and assessment is just in its infancy. McAlester (2000) convincingly argues that ‘evaluation’, ‘assessment’, ‘criticism’, and ‘analysis’ which are being used synonymously in the relevant literature should be referred to as ‘words’ since “they are too implicitly defined to be called ‘**terms**’ [emphasis added]” (p. 231). In order to differentiate among various practices, translation terminology is gradually being evolved. To date, some efforts have been made to clarify this terminology and to identify and define different types of translation quality assessment procedures. As a typical example, Brunette (2000), addressing this problem in her article attempted to define the key terms specific to this field. Other instances include Adab (2004), Kim (2004), House (2001b), Ivanova (1998), Kussmaul (1995), Sainz (1994), Farahzad (1992) just to mention a few among others.

McAlester (1999, 2000) uses the term ‘translation assessment’ as a cover term for the followings: translation evaluation (placing a numerical value on a translation e.g. a grade or rate it with points), translator evaluation (granting accreditation or giving qualification), translation criticism (stating the adequacy or appropriateness of a translation), translation analysis (comparing descriptively a translation and its original to ascertain translator’s methods), and translation quality control (assessing the translation product/service per se rather than the translator). Likewise, Hatim and Mason (1997) distinguish between translation quality control/assessment and translation criticism on the one hand and translation performance evaluation on the other.

Thus, as a matter of clarification, these terms were specifically used in the following ways except for quotations from other works. Terms like 'translation quality assessment (TQA)', 'translation quality management (TQM)' or 'quality control (QC)' which are more frequently used

in non-academic settings as the jargon of translation industry were deliberately avoided in this study. Those terminologies often associated with translation criticism and professional translation such as 'judgment' or 'criticism' will not be used here too. The term 'testing translation quality' was generally selected as it implies the notions of summative (as well as formative) evaluation conducted to evaluate and score translations of translator trainees' informal tests. More specifically, the term 'translation evaluation' was preferred because it conveys the concept of 'decision-making'; i.e., predicated on the translation quality, it is decided whether a translator trainee would pass or fail. Likewise, McAlester (2000) defined translation evaluation as “the placing of a value on a translation; i.e., awarding a mark, even if only a binary pass/fail one. It is this procedure, in particular, that should strive to fulfill the four conditions” (p. 231).

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