Teacher Training University

The Quality Assessment of English-Persian Translation of Modern Drama according to House's Model:

A Case Study in "Theatre of the Absurd"

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By

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Abstract

Translation quality assessment has been a matter of controversy in Translation Studies; the most important concern relates to subjectivity versus objectivity in the field. Since anyone's stance is different from another's, the quality assessment suffers from the case of subjectivity; as a consequence, the process of assessment of the same text may come up to different results. The models on translation quality assessment try to solve the problem by suggesting theoretical frameworks for assessing. The present study assesses the quality of four outstanding works of modern drama, which belong to Theatre of the Absurd, according to an influential model presented by Juliane House in 1977 and revisited in 1997; the revisited model is meant in this study. The four works under study are Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" and "Endgame" and Harold Pinter's "The Room" and "The Dumb Waiter". After putting the introduction and reviewing the related literature, an explanation of the model and the corpus of the study are stated. In chapter four, the results along with related examples and discussion are presented.

Key words: Translation quality assessment, House's model, modern drama, Theatre of the Absurd

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Regarding the growing interest to get acquaintance with other cultures and attitudes through reading literary texts and their translations, in a world wrapped up in various beliefs and attitudes, the need for translation enhances. The translators produce the target texts to provide those who do not know the foreign language with what they desire. Among the very translations which are produced, there may be some which might not be transferred with great care, and they may cause misunderstandings. Translation quality assessment (TQA) is one way to evaluate the existing translations so as to differentiate good translations from those which are not translated with great care. The result can helpfully guide people to choose a more adequate translation.

An important thing to consider is that the assessment of translation quality should be as objective as possible. To prevent any subjective assessment, one should do it systematically according to a theoretical view or model. In House's words "in translation criticism we have to make explicit the grounds for our judgment basing it on a theoretically sound and argued set of intersubjectively verifiable set of procedures. A detailed analysis of the "hows" and the "whys" of a translated text (i.e., its linguistic forms and functions) in comparison with the original from which it is derived, is the descriptive foundation for any valid, and argued assessment of whether, how, and to what degree a given translation can be taken to be (more or less) adequate" (2oo1: 256).

The first systematic view towards the evaluation of translated texts was proposed by Nida through 'the principle of equivalent effect' (Munday, 2001:42). One of the influential models in this area has been proposed by House in 1977 revisited in 1997. Her model is based on Halliday's notions of field, tenor, and mode. In fact, she adopted Halliday's model of register analysis and developed it in order that both the source text and target text can be compared systematically. This study will be based on the revisited model.

The study focuses on evaluating the translations of four outstanding works in "Theatre of the Absurd". *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, two of the works under study, are written by Samuel Beckett and translated by Behrooz H. Mohammadi. The other two are Harold Pinter's *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter* translated by Reza Dadooi.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Due to the fact that many translated dramatic texts in Persian have been produced for the sake of reading and not performing, translators of this literary genre should be very careful in conveying the source text to the target text. They should consider different aspects of the source text which have been originally produced to be performed and convey them to a target text which has been mainly produced to be read. Bassnett (1998) sees language as 'the primary material of the translator' and believes that, 'searching for deep structures and trying to render the text performable is not the responsibility of the translator' (90). What she says is thoroughly true about the target text which is to be performed, but what about the target text which is produced to be read? In fact, when a text is performed, this performance per se can help better conveying meaning. When a

text is translated to be read in the target language, how is the quality of this translation in comparison to its original counterpart? Can it convey the meaning properly as what the source text does? How much do the translators achieve the goal of conveying the desired meaning of the original writers?

Based on these notions, translation quality assessment should be done to find out how much the translators who render source texts to target texts could cope with translating and to find out whether different translators do differently in translating the literary genre of drama. Moreover, there are different argues about whether to translate dramatic texts literally or freely so a quality assessment model which results in recognizing the kind of translation can be very much helpful.

1.3. Significance of the Study

As Bassnett (1991) states, 'in the history of translation studies, less has been written on problems of translating theatre texts than on translating any other text type' (99). Several researches have been done on translating drama but they have investigated the strategies applied by translators to translate this genre or studied the performability of the translated texts. Among them is Abdullahi's (1997) *Performability in Persian Translation of English theatre texts*. Another example is Ahmadi (2009) who investigated the strategies used in stage directions of *Waiting for Godot* and *Oleana*. Also, relating to evaluation, several studies have been done among which are Beikian's (2005) *on the evaluation of two English-Persian machine translation programs*, and H. Mohammadi's (2006) *Translation Evaluation in IRIB News Agency*.

This study is of significance since it evaluates the translations of modern drama systematically in order to decide about the quality of translation and to find out the kind of translation. In fact, the research hopes to evaluate the quality of the translations under study according to an influential translation quality assessment model proposed by House in 1977 and revisited in 1997. As Munday (2001) states, "House's (1977, 1997) model of register analysis is designed to compare an ST-TT pair for situational variables, genre, function and language, and to identify both the translation method employed ('covert' or 'overt') and translation errors" (105).

Besides assessing the quality of the translations, and deciding about the kind of translations, the study highlights the changes made because of target language structure and also the arbitrary changes due to the style of the translator. For instance, it highlights the differences in theme, order, and linkages between the two languages under study.

1.4. Research Questions

Considering several aspects of translating modern drama as a literary genre, the following questions will be dealt with in this research:

1. How is the quality of English-Persian translation of modern drama according to House's translation quality assessment model?
2. According to the mentioned model, to which category of overt or covert translation do the translations belong?

1.5. Definition of key terms

Theatre of the Absurd: The term refers to a particular type of play which first became popular during the 1950s and 1960s and which presented on stage the philosophy articulated by French philosopher Albert Camus in his 1942 essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which he defines the human condition as basically meaningless (P. Crabb, 2006).

House's model: The model involves a systematic comparison of the textual profile of the ST and TT. The schema for this comparison is as shown in figure 1. After comparing the texts and finding mismatches or errors, a 'statement of the quality' is made of the translation and then, the translation can be categorized into one of two types: overt translation or covert translation. (Munday, 2001: 92)

Field: Field captures social activity, subject matter or topic, including differentiations of degrees of generality, specificity or "granularity" in lexical items according to rubrics of specialized, general, and popular (House, 2001: 248).

Tenor: Tenor refers to the nature of the participants, the addresser and the addressees, and the relationships between them in terms of social power and social distance, as well as degree of emotional charge. Included here are the text producer's temporal, geographical and social provenance as well as his intellectual, emotional or affective stance (his "personal viewpoint") vis a vis the content she is portraying. Further, Tenor captures "social attitude," i.e. different styles (formal, consultative and informal) (House, 2001: 248).

Mode: Mode refers to both the channel—spoken or written (which can be "simple," i.e., "written to be read" or "complex," e.g. "written to be spoken as if not written"), and the degree to which potential or real participation is allowed for between writer and reader (House, 2001: 248).

Overt translation: An overt translation is one in which the addressees of the translation text are quite overtly not being directly addressed (House, 1997:66).

Covert translation: A covert translation is a translation which enjoys the status of an original source text in the target culture (House, 1997: 69).

Figure1. House's scheme for analyzing and comparing ST and TT
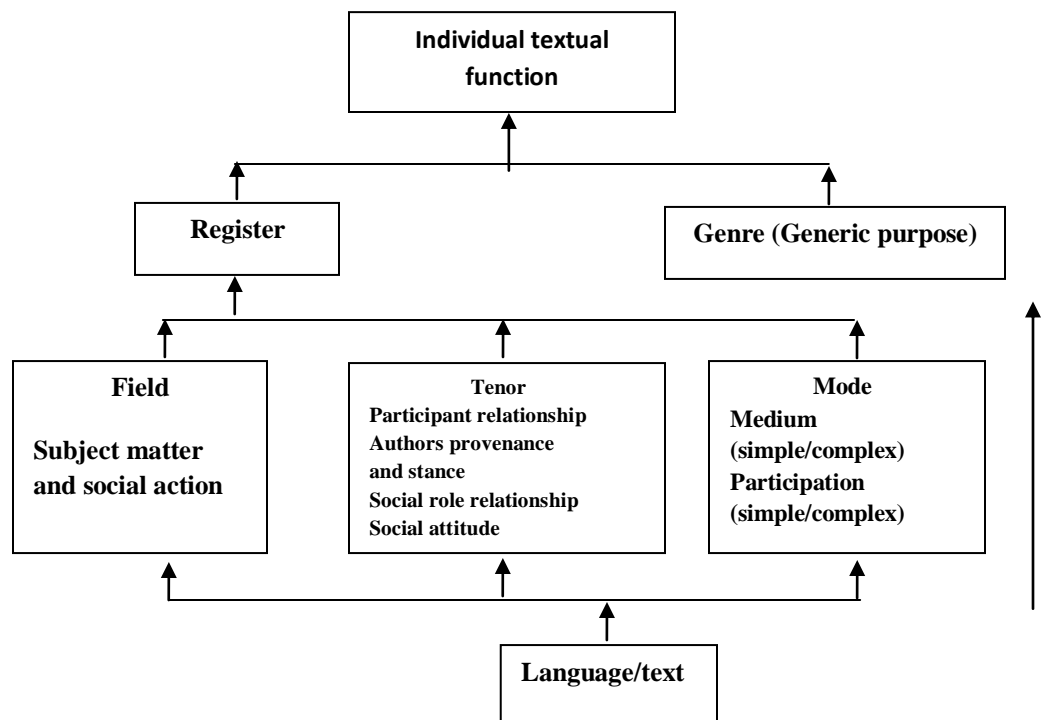
1.6. Delimitations of the Study

As there are different trends in modern drama in translating which different strategies should be applied, the study is limited to one phase of this genre known as "Theatre of the Absurd". Moreover, just four works are analyzed since the process of assessing according to the mentioned model is a time-consuming process. These four works are outstanding works in "Theatre of the Absurd" as a considerable part of modern drama. These works written by Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter have similar features since they all belong to the same part of literary genre.

CHAPTER TWO:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Drama

The word "drama", as R .F. Clarke (1965) states, may have several meanings; in newspapers and magazines, for instance, it refers to "some sensational events". The word can also be referred to "a group of people performing in front of spectators" (7). Nowadays it usually refers to plays. In his view "a 'drama' is usually a play which is intensely existing or moving, yet which can hardly be classified as Tragedy or Comedy". Moreover, he differentiate the word with the word "theatre" and believes that "a theatre is really a place where plays are performed, and if we talk about 'the Theatre' we tend to think more about the business, or industry, of drama, and how plays are performed, than about the contents the of plays themselves" (8).

Music, dancing, magic, and ceremony are, as Clarke says, the forms of expressions which led to the birth of drama. He further states that "The main point on which arguers agree is that drama began as a form of religious expression" (ibid, 10). In different chapters of his book, *The Growth and Nature of Drama*, he explains about the beginning and development of drama up to now. He believes that the bases of performance of what we know as drama were in ancient Greece in the period 2000 or 3000 B.C. ancient Greece has three outstanding figures in drama who were the writers of tragedy, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Besides these writers Aristophanes is known to be a writer of comedies (11-20).

After Greeks, Romans reestablished this literary genre mainly by imitating Greeks. After Romans there came a long period known as "Dark Ages". Then, it was the time for "Middle Ages" (21-22), a time of progress in any field of literature consisting drama.

New buildings were built in order for the plays to be performed indoor. Especially in "Elizabethan Age" there was a growth which influenced late dramas. In this age, the increase in drama works at schools and colleges caused many plays to be written by schoolboys and college students for the sake of performance.

Drama was in progress day after day and great dramatists were born until the time that modern drama came to existence by writings of a Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, whose plays showed the lives of the ordinary people. After him from the beginning of the twentieth century other writers in Europe began to write about ordinary people and their lives.

2.1.1. Modern Drama

In different stages of history there exist artists and literary men who have tried to present new ideas or what going on in the world through their works. As a result, various techniques and genres have come to the existence in each stage. Modern world has brought with it modern attitudes to life as a result of social, political or religious changes. Literary works are not only used as a device for joy but their most important role is to present new attitudes and the reality happening in the world.

A part of modern literary works belongs to modern drama. The first trends known as modern drama was in relation to realism and naturalism. Sima Norouzi (2004) in her book *Modern Drama and Criticism* believes that, "the modernists who called themselves naturalists were dedicated to the cause of evolving a 'natural science' of human behavior and considered themselves 'dramatists'" (ii). She further declares that, "enthusiasts of

naturalistic doctrine proposed to study man as creature inexorably determined by his social situation, or milieu" (iii).

Modern drama is known to be started in the nineteenth century with the work of Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906) who provided a realistic view to life for the readers and the audiences. His first works were in concern with the social problems, morality, and social institutions. Then, he moved toward driven individuals who become involved in self destructive personal relationships. *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *The Wild Duck* (1884), *Hedda Gabler* (1890), and *The Master Builder* (1892) are among his famous works. Other important and influencing characters in modern drama are as follows:

- August Strindberg (1849-1912): an outstanding figure of modern drama that is known for his Naturalistic plays. *Miss Julie* (1888), *The Creditors* (1889), *A Dream Play* (1902), *The Ghost Sonata* (1907) are his well-known works.

- Anton Chekov (1860-1904): well-known for the psychological realism. *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *The Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) are his influencing works. His emphasis on character over plot set new standards.

- George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950): a socialist, who founded the Fabian Society. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), *Man and Superman* (1903), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1913), and *Saint Joan* (1923) are his famous works. In his works, character was subordinated to ideas.

- Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956): pioneered a new kind of drama called "epic theatre". *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939), *The*

Good Woman of Setzuan (1943), and *The Caucasian Circle* (1945) are known to be his outstanding works.

- Samuel Beckett (1906-1989): one of the playwrights in the 40s and 50s who worked within the framework of what has become known as "Theatre of the Absurd". In fact "Theatre of the Absurd" is believed to be started by his famous work *Waiting for Godot. Endgame* (1958) and *Happy Days* (1961) are two of his outstanding works.

Emma Goldman (1911) talks about modern drama as "the leaven of radical thought and the disseminator of new values" in her article *Modern Drama: a powerful disseminator of radical thought*. She states that, "It might seem an exaggeration to ascribe to the modern drama such an important role. But a study of the development of modern ideas in most countries will prove that the drama has succeeded in driving home great social truths, truths generally ignored when presented in other forms."

Susan C. W. Abbotson (2003) in her book *Thematic Guide to Modern Drama* categorizes 33 themes and brings as example 3 plays for each theme. These themes are as follows: absurdity of life, Aging, ambition and fame, betrayal and guilt, courtship, death, decisions and life choices, growing up, the heritage of slavery, historical heritage, historical heritage, illness and disability, international cultural communities, issues of sexuality, law and justice, the "Life-Lie", magic and the supernatural, marriage, parents and children, religion (Christianity), a sense of community, sibling relationships, substance abuse, war and violence, women's Issues, work, worlds of the deaf and blind.