

## The Name and Nature of Translations Criticism

اسم وطبيعة نقد الترجمات

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### Abstract:

Throughout the ages, judgements about translations were mere value appreciations based on sentimental comfort given by the reading of a given translation. Thus, adjectives like “good”, “bad”, “fluent” or “awkward” were often used to qualify the quality of translations. Often set by non-translators or non-specialists in translation, these remarks were usually anecdotal and suffered from a severe shallowness. Therefore, the need for more consistent criticism based on translation bound criteria with scientific criteria has become urgent.

This article attempts to define and to delineate this field called translation(s) criticism then to bring out its specificities because it takes a new genre of texts as object of study.

**Keywords:** Translation, translated literature, translations criticism, criticism, quality assessment.

### ملخص:

عبر قرون عديدة كانت الأحكام عن الترجمات مجرد أحكام قيمة تأتي نتيجة لانطباق القارئ عن الترجمة. لذلك كانت الصفات من قبيل "جيدة" و "سيئة" أو "سلسلة" أو "ركيكة" تطلق لتوصيف نوعية وجود الترجمة. والملاحظ أن هذه الأحكام غالبا ما كانت تصدر عن غير مختصين في الترجمات لذا كانت تشكو من ضحالة بينة. فكان من الضروري أن يصاغ نقد ترجمي أكثر صرامة ودقة.

يهدف هذا المقال إلى تحديد وتبيان الميدان المسمى نقد الترجمة (الترجمات) وتوضيح خصوصياته

بما أنه يستند إلى نوع جديد من النصوص.

**الكلمات المتاحة:** الترجمة. الأدب المترجم. نقد الترجمات. النقد. تقييم الجودة.

### 1.Introduction:

Borrowing this article’s title from James Holmes’ founding article “The name and nature of Translation Studies” is a tribute that I address to a Translation Studies pioneer, as did Jean Delisle in his book “La traduction raisonnée” emulating Jean Darbelnet’s one. This action has a double aim, firstly, insisting on the belonging of translation criticism to Translation Studies as a subdivision of applied TS.

Secondly, discussing its place in Holmes' map, since I consider that, this very place is so misunderstood either in theoretical or practical Translation Studies.

My main concern arose from the chaos noticed in translation criticism, especially that of journalistic reviews. The blurriness of the terminology and of the criteria used to qualify translation lead me to posit that a more precise terminology including, of course, the criteria used may help to reduce these ambiguities and eventually help critics as well as translators in making decisions.

## 2. What is translation?

At first blush, it may seem a bit strange to define translation at this stage. However, translation criticism is strongly based on how we see translation. I could say that every conception or misconception on every aspect of translation is bound to one's definition of what is translation. Translation is, therefore, a complex concept that can be defined as:

“both a cognitive procedure which occurs in a human being's, the translator's, head, and a social, cross-linguistic and cross-cultural practice [...] Translation can [also] be defined as the result of a linguistic-textual operation in which a text in one language is re-contextualized in another language.” (House, 2015, pp 1; 3)

It is important to say that every language/culture has its own definition of translation, even every scholar has his own. In the Arabic tradition for example translation (الترجمة) means explanation and interpretation. If we want to understand a translation scholar and his opinion on translation we must understand his definition of it. Berman's literalist position stems from his axiom about translation: *La traduction est traduction-de-la-lettre, du texte en tant qu'il est lettre.* (Berman, 1985, p 45).

## 3. Towards a delimitation of the notion of translations criticism:

If we look closely at the two-word name (translation criticism), we find translation on the one hand and criticism on the other. Why translations in plural? Because, following Berman (1995), in order to avoid confusion between whether we criticize translation as a cognitive process, as a procedure or as a result.

This is maybe the reason why the term has for long time been considered as a negative process of rebuking translations errors and translators failures. In fact, it is a cross-cultural phenomenon to judge translations on nothing but impressions and blurry concepts of 'good' and 'bad'. Moreover, almost all judgements were provided by non-specialists in translating or in the theory of translation, consequently, these judgements were too amateurish and sometimes naïve. For instance, journalistic translation's criticism is characterized by such an attitude and

judgements are as: “Beautifully translated,” “a fine job,” “this apparently ungraceful translation,” “the translation holds up well,” “sensitive and truly faithful in spirit,” or “the translation is adequate, but somewhat wooden and pedestrian.” (Schulte, 1988, paragr 02).

Translations criticism is an old yet a new field in Translation Studies. Old because, taken as value judgements, it was known by men for long time ago. Moreover, new because, as a subdivision of Translation Studies, it is only known by scholars and specialized readers for some decades.

I think it is central to set the importance of this hybrid type of criticism before going further. Translations criticism was thought not important, “Since [it] does not normally generate much interest, even among translators” (Hung, 1995), it could be avoided, forgotten and is by this way meaningless to translated literature. Because who can read a criticism on translations? Who can afford to spend days in reading meticulously a long dissertation about a translated work when he could read a short review in newspapers or on the internet? For the common reader (who by the way represents the important factor in the book market) the important thing to know about a new translation is that it is worth reading or not and thus worth buying or not.

The purpose of translations criticism had a major impact on the way it is presented. In other words, its final form depends on many factors:

- The genre of the translated text.
- The personality of the critic.
- The recipient of the criticism.
- The topic or the subject of the source text.

Thus, the critic writes his criticism according to texts typology (Reiss, 1972) if it is a legal text it will imperatively be different from a poetic one. Text type commands the way of translating and by consequence the form of criticism. On the other hand, the receiver to whom the criticism is destined plays an equal major role in how it is written. Translation criticism scholars or translations studies ones therefore, will have a very different criticism than the one addressed to general public readership.

Translation criticism in Holmes’ map is part of Applied Translation Studies. However, I think that its role goes beyond that restricted area. I may venture and say that every discourse on translation (cognitively), translating (procedurally) or translations (as a result) is *in fine* a criticism of translation(s). Therefore, there are two types of translations criticism; a theoretical one concerned with general discussion of translating issues and an empirical one focused on the systematic analysis of a given translation (or two and more translations).

#### 4. The Translations critic:

In order to draw a precise picture of translations criticism we must look closer to the individual who undertake this task; the translations' critic. Because if TC is built upon an objective basis taken out from a good understanding of the concept of translation, the one who is doing this mission must have some characteristics. I mean intellectual abilities, a solid scientific formation, and all features that can help the critic to enlarge his knowledge and translation expertise.

However, reality is not as bright as that. Most critics were not really ones in that every reader of a translation whether he/she is a writer, a poet, a literary critic, a philosopher and even journalists, would judge this translated work and offer his opinion. No wonder if judgement chaos arose and was a general rule during decades. The reason, in my opinion is the lack of studies on the critic himself when talking about translations criticism.

It is important to remind the reader that we are talking here only about translated literature. Therefore, the critic of this kind of texts should have a *sieve* made of his/her studies, training, experiences and readings. These features are combined with a natural aptitude of discerning good literature from bad one; it is that aptitude which makes us distinguish good critics from others. I know it may seem a subjective component in the critic personality, and yes, it is, because every objective assessment of a translation is an *a posteriori* objectivation of a subjective impression sparkled in the mind of the critic after he/she reads this translation.

When this aptitude is sharpened by experience, i.e. analysing a great number of translations in addition to thorough readings in translations studies and every domain capable of helping criticism to be as accurate as possible, the critic will be aware of the discrepancies that may occur between ST and its translation(s). Moreover, he/she must have two or more languages to be capable of doing a comparative criticism. He/she is the only specialist who can speak about the quality of a translation whether it is good or bad.

The critic is above all a translator; however, besides all the competences a translator must acquire, the critic must have some extras:

“ En ce qui touche les compétences de l'évaluateur, aux qualités exigées du traducteur s'ajoutent un jugement sûr, la constance dans les décisions, l'objectivité, le tact, l'entregent, le sens de l'organisation, ainsi que la capacité de justifier ses interventions et de distinguer révision et contrôle.” (Larose, 1998).

This is the area of expertise of the critic, written translated text with its inner laws. For, the critic is dealing, like the translator, with two languages, two worlds and two cultures. The analysed translation is a text written upon the source text, a realm upon the original one and finally a culture hiding an inner one. Consequently, complexity leads to complications in making criticism as objective as possible

because of too subjective features coming from ideology inherent to every literary work and to every critic.

I can say that what Michael Nu'aima said about literary critic is valid about translations critic:

“Indeed, the critic’s task is the sieving, not of people but of what people write as ideas, feelings and orientations. That is what we are used to name literature. The task of the critic is the sieving of literary works not their authors.” (Nu'aima, 1991)

So is the task of translations critic, filtering translated literary works not translators. More specifically, he/she focuses on textual characteristics of both texts, or as Dodds (1985, p 173) put it:

“the translation critic has to be able to describe and analyse both texts as well as all the kinds of ‘spatial, temporal, social or other relationships’ between the source language and the target language texts. In other words, the translator critic has to be able to perform both tasks; he must be aware of textual, linguistic and stylistic structures in the original text and he must also have a high bilingual so as to be able to proceed to a comparative analysis of the original and the target language version in order to ascertain whether and to what extent equivalence structures have been found in the translation.”

## **5. Relationship between translations criticism and adjacent fields:**

### **5.1. Translations criticism and translation theory:**

Translations criticism is dependent on the critic’s conception of translation as a process and as a result altogether. As mentioned above, the critic should be specialized in Translation Studies and keen on translation theory (and a translator too). According to this theory, which has its own view on how the translation process is, or should be and what the relevant outcome is? He/she therefore build his judgement. So, how do translation theories influence translations criticism?

It is obvious that every field has a theoretical and a practical aspect. The temptation was to assume both are divergent and irreconcilable. Thus, raised the ancient rows between theorists and empiricists. That is also true in Translation Studies. My own conception of translations criticism is mainly based on Berman’s critique (1995). I share with him the source oriented literalist approach altogether with his *projet analytique*. Hermeneutical translation theory adopted by Berman was “inspired on the one hand by Ricœur and Jauss, and on the other hand by Benjamin’s critical approach.” (Hewson, 2011, 11). In addition, for his empirical part, he chose a literalist translator and critic, Meschonnic and the descriptive approach of Tel Aviv School.

This is true because every practical procedure must have a theoretical background.

“In my opinion, we should think inversely that the development of LTC depends on the improvement of the literary translation theory and the establishment of a rather unified standard of translation criticism.”  
(Xu Jun, 2020: 180)

The problem however is in the multiplicity of theories in translation. They are sometimes even contradictory. That is what Nida (2006) pointed out when he said:

In developing a theory of translation there are so often a number of wrong concepts that constitute problems for the study of interlingual communication: first, the idea that translation is a science and second, the assumption that translating depends on a theory of language that includes all classes of texts, audiences, and circumstances of use.

## 5.2. Translations criticism and Translation didactics:

Among important questions in Translation Studies, the one on how do we translate is the most important. This was sometimes unexpressed but it underwent almost all translation theories.

On the other hand, as Jean-Claude G  mar mentioned:

Si l'on s'interroge depuis toujours ou presque sur la mani  re de traduire, en revanche ce n'est que depuis quelques d  cennies que l'on se pose vraiment la question : comment enseigner    traduire ? (G  mar, 1996)

The difficulty of this question comes from the status of translation, especially literary one, for long being considered as an art depending on a gifted translator. Moreover, that sort of sensitive craft has not constituted a matter to be taught. Thus, Martinez Melis (2001) declares,

Ce n'est que r  cemment que l'  valuation dans la didactique de la traduction est trait  e d'une mani  re un peu plus syst  matique dans les publications. Rien d'  tonnant puisque la didactique de la traduction n'est pas encore un sujet tr  s appr  ci   par les chercheurs en traduction.

In translation classes, students are asked to translate and to comment their translations or other translators' ones. TC is a good means to understand translation as a cross language/culture phenomenon.

According to (Newmark 1988: 185),

Translation criticism is an essential component in a translation course: firstly, because it painlessly improves your competence as a translator; secondly, because it expands your knowledge and understanding of

your own and the foreign language, as well as perhaps of the topic; thirdly, because, in presenting you with options, it will help you to sort out your ideas about translation.

In my opinion, translation didactics has provided translation criticism with the central issue of the concept of error in evaluation and thus in translation. This to be considered as important in TC in that it enlighten the critic's judgement in understanding the reasons of translation's error, not to classify it according to its type but also to its impact in the translated text.

We must not forget that translation didactics aims to train translators through translation lessons and exercises. Error divisions here should be taken as an indicator of the types of errors and faults, not as a general illustration. The error in literary translation may differ from that of a student at a translation institute. First, because the psychological and institutional situation varies, and secondly because the texts involved vary in terms of type, size and translation time.

There is a distinction between fault and error, in fact, specialists are asserting that the error is systematic, i.e. steady and follows a single path, often related to a language confusion. Fault on the other hand is a non-systematic arbitrary occurrence, easy to observe without having to look back at the original text.

Attempts to get rid of the negative view of the mistake have emerged today. Because the mistake is due to the learner's ignorance of the rule and the mistake is even more terrible because the learner has recognized the rule but has not applied it. Teachers have always been afraid to correct mistakes until they have the so-called red ink syndrome.

Error and faults are essential concepts for translations criticism, as each critic who reads a translated text must note that there are errors. Daniel Gouadec (1974: 9) has divided the error in translation into three types:

1. Nonsense: shows a complete lack of understanding of the text or part of the text to be translated.
2. Countersense: This opposite meaning occurs when the word is given meaning other than its real one.
3. False-sense: It results from a misinterpretation of the meaning of a word in the text.

### **5.3. Translations criticism and assessment and review methods:**

TC is a judgement stemming from a preconceived conception of translation and its true essence. Therefore, criticism differs according to different ideas about translation; Antoine Berman (1995) considered it a new kind of criticism, which means criticism in a broader sense. Criticism may also vary depending on the

position and status of the critic, for instance, he who works for an international organization and is concerned with evaluating official texts (political publications, statements, decisions...) produce a work that is not called criticism but rather an evaluation.

The two terms, although not referring to the same meaning, were used by scholars interchangeably and sometimes as sub-part of the other term classification. So did Newmark (1985) when he presented his Translation analysis model when he made evaluation a part of translation criticism.

In order to avoid such confusion, we must mention that evaluation of translation, and the accompanying concepts such as quality control, review, etc., are methods adopted by publishing institutions or international organizations before publishing any translation. Evaluation, therefore, deals with translation as a result, and comes in the final stage because the evaluated text is final. Here we must aware that,

" Il importe dès le départ de ne pas confondre évaluation et révision de textes puisque cette dernière activité intervient au stade du produit semi-fini et vise à l'amélioration d'un texte donné. Évaluer n'est donc pas réviser." (Larose, 1998).

The objective of the evaluation, as defined by Robert Larose, carries almost the same features as Katarina Reiss' translation criticism, as she wanted practical criteria for criticism, applicable to many types of texts, and closer to objectivity in order to avoid value judgements and vain clashes, which adversely affect both TC and translated works.

After distinguishing between translation evaluation and review, Larose divides translation evaluation procedures into two parts: the first is to describe the evaluator object and to determine the criteria and conditions for evaluation. The second includes an attempt to make the assessment more objective, by removing all factors that enable the evaluator to appear in his assessment.

The evaluation is descriptive, i.e. it does not interfere with the translated text, as opposed to the review that corrects the errors in it. This is the difference between criticism and evaluation, as evaluation judges the outcome of translation work, while criticism judges on the result of translation work based on the translation process of reading and interpreting the text conducted by the translator, or should have been conducted, in addition to correcting errors and proposing suggestions for retranslation.

We believe that TC corresponds to the assessment in its first phase, namely, determining the linguistic quality of translations, counting errors, their type and severity. He meets with the review in that he proposes a correction of existing errors. Finally, it is a judgment on the translator as a producer of translation.



TC has several functions, so a critic who takes on this difficult task must work on several levels: the first is to detect the errors or distortions that the translator has attached to the original text. The second is to try to extract the translator's translation project. The third is to confront the target text with the original text. Fourth, preparations for the retranslation of the text through productive criticism.

One of the common mistakes a translation critic faces when criticizing literary translations, for example, is that the translator omit to render parts of the original text (words, sentences, or even paragraphs and passages). It is noticeable that this omission process was widely used among translators at different periods and languages. The main objective was to shorten the target text. The reasons are numerous, including:

- If the translator works for a publishing house, he falls under pressure from the publisher who wants to reduce publishing expenses.

- Time constraints may thrust the translator to shorten the text, because he is under productive pressure (e.g. having a deadline to deliver the translation.)

- Shortening may be for the simple reason that the translator needs money, because if he/she practices translation as a freelancer, he/she may recourse to the shortening to complete as many translations as possible to increase his income.

Omission may have other reasons that fall beyond the translation process itself and encompass ideology and ethics. The translator may delete passages from the original if he thinks they are not important, which is called modulation. He may resort to deleting passages that offend the ideology or creed of the target audience,

as Adel Zaatar did in his translation of Gustave Lebon's "Civilization of the West", In order not to hurt his fellow people, he chose to delete and amputate all mentions whatsoever of any attacks on Islam, his Prophet and the Quran contained in the book. This method eventually valid in political propaganda, cultural struggle and religious arguments, is unacceptable in the translation field. (Khomry, 2006: 295)

Some scholars and even readers totally disagree with the researcher, and they see the omission as a consideration of the justifications mentioned in the paragraph are acceptable and even imposed to the translator who adheres to the specificities of his culture and the principles of his religion. On the other hand, they also refuse to be considered by the other to be inferior, and that their heritage must be aestheticized in order to be presented to the West in what Berman calls annexing translations.

#### 5.4. Translations criticism and literary criticism :

Among adjacent fields evolving in Criticism realm, the closest to translations criticism is without a doubt literary criticism. We may venture that translation is, in its core, a criticism. Should we define criticism first?

In his ground-breaking work Berman (1995) confirmed that: “On s’acheminerait par là vers une pratique ouverte, et non plus solitaire, du traduire. Et vers l’institution d’une critique des traductions parallèle et complémentaire à la critique des textes.”

*Parallèle et complémentaire*, comparable and complementary to textual criticism. Therefore, criticising literary translations is analogous to evaluating literary texts. It is even a new genre of literary criticism. The differences can be summarized as following:

Literary criticism	Translations criticism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyses literary works</li> <li>- One text, one language</li> <li>- Based on an a literary theory(ies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Analyses translated literary works.</li> <li>- Two texts, two languages (or more, case of comparative translations criticism)</li> <li>- Based on a translation theory(ies)</li> </ul>

The problem is that even literary criticism is not to be considered as a whole. There is a multitude of approaches to literary criticism. Hence, translations critic can only one or a combination of approaches as did Antoine Berman (1995) in his analysis of the translation of John Donne’s poem.

#### 6. Conclusion:

In this article our aim was to shed lights on a new genre of literary works criticism. These works are not written in the language of the original author but translated into another idiom. Consequently, one should not apply literary criticism on it but a new criticism aware of the binary nature of translation process. Here we join Larose when he assets that every translation evaluation should encompass four elements; the object of evaluation, the evaluator, the parameters and the method.

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