

JULIANE HOUSE (1942-)

“A Model for Assessing Translation Quality” (1977)

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equivalence, functional equivalence, translation quality assessment, covert translation, functional-pragmatic model, linguistic analysis

1. Author information

Juliane House is the president of IATIS (International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies) and one of the key figures in Translation Studies. She obtained her first degree in English and Spanish Translation and International Law from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and then received a BEd, MA and PhD in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at the University of Toronto, Canada. She also holds an honorary doctorate earned from the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Her research covers both theory and practice of translation and it focuses on contrastive pragmatics, discourse analysis, politeness theory, English as a lingua franca, intercultural communication and global business communication. Currently, she is the head of the Applied Linguistics Department at the Hellenic American University in Athens, Greece and coordinates a number of translation projects as a senior member of the German Science's Foundation Center on Multilingualism at Hamburg University.

Her first important publication was her Ph.D dissertation *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment and Some Implications for Foreign Language Teaching* (1976), on which she based the article *A Model for Assessing Translation Quality*, presented at the BAAL Seminar of Translation in Exeter and subsequently published in *Meta* one year later. The model that she developed in her thesis was then re-discussed after 20 years in *Translation Quality Assessment: A Model Revisited* (1997). Other essential publications by House include *Interlingual and Intercultural*

Communication (1986), *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics* (1989) *Multilingual Communication* (2004) and *Translatory Action and Intercultural Communication* (2009).

2. Abstract

The article is concerned with establishing a model of translation quality assessment based on equivalence. The aim of translation is to transfer and preserve the semantic, pragmatic and textual meaning of the source text, thus a successful translation requires that the original text be replaced by a target text which is semantically and pragmatically equivalent. The equivalence is determined by comparing the functions of both texts which means that the linguistic evidence of any given text must be analysed on the syntactic, lexical and textual level and referred to the situation of both the user of the text and the use of language. For this purpose the author sketches a model of *dimensions of language use* that serve as a point of reference for the situational analysis. The textual profile is defined on the basis of the following dimensions: medium, participation, social role relationship, social attitude and province. The equivalence is achieved when both ST and TT display the same textual profile, i. e. they apply matching situational means for each dimension. If the target text fails to apply comparable dimensional means, a *covertly erroneous error* occurs. The model is especially appropriate for quality assessment of what the author calls *covert translation*, in which ST is not inherently tied to the community of the source language users, but is equally relevant for both audiences. In covert translation TT obtains the status of “a second original” and thereby should maintain the textual profile of ST. The case of *overt translation* concerns texts that are naturally rooted in the source language or culture and bear some cultural specificity that needs to be preserved in the translated version, which makes it impossible to transfer the exact function of ST into TT.

3. Terminology

Source text term	Meaning	Term in Polish
functional equivalence	comparability of the function of source text and target text	ekwiwalencja funkcjonalna
function of a text	application or use which the text has in the context of a situation	funkcja tekstu
situational dimensions	aspects of the text's situations that serve to define the function of a text	wymiary sytuacyjne
textual profile	a profile that characterizes the function of the text	profil tekstowy
covertly erroneous error	a mismatch of function along the situational dimensions	błąd ukryty
overtly erroneous error	a non-dimensional mismatch (e.g. literal translation or distortion of meaning)	błąd jawny

4. Methodology

In order to carry out a quality assessment of a translation it is necessary to establish the function of the given text. The primary method applied for the research is a thorough, detailed analysis of the source text in relation to its context and situation, applying the model of situational dimensions. This enables us to determine the function of the source text and compare it to the profile of the

translated text, so that both source text and target text are approached from the same angle. Establishing the function of the text subsequently allows to state the equivalence of ST and TT. The above model is based on the assumption that the audiences of both texts constitute a similar group in their respective societies and are standard language speakers. The application of the model is subject to a number of conditions, i. e. cultures of both source and target language must be materially comparable and both texts intertranslatable – it is assumed that certain features of particular languages, such as the presence or absence of the second person formal pronouns (*Pan, Pani* in Polish vs. *you* in English) should be treated as exceptions and excluded from the analysis. Furthermore, the translated text must not include any additional function, i. e. an added purpose that is relevant only to the target language community.

5. Links with other publications on the subject

House's model of situational dimensions is an adaptation of a concept of *dimensions of situational constraint* proposed by D. Crystal and D. Davy in *Investigating English Style* (1969).

The notion of equivalence in translation has been widely studied and discussed in a number of publications by some of the most prominent scholars of translation, including Mona Baker, R. Jakobson, John C. Catford, Eugene A. Nida, Dorothy Kenny and others.

6. Critical commentary

The mere concept of linguistic equivalence as a factor that determines the quality of a translation might not appear to be extremely revealing - one can assume that any professional translator instinctively understands that certain features of the source text must be adapted to the target language so that it preserves its original register and function. However, when it comes to assessing a translation, it is necessary to

adopt certain criteria and work within some operational framework. House's paper should prove to be contributory to those interested in translation quality assessment. Her pragmatic approach to the notion of equivalence responds clearly to the aim of any covertly translation, which is to ensure that the original message is properly understood by the target audience. House's model of situational dimensions is very comprehensive and facilitates the analysis of a text. The presentation of the method and the author's concept of overt and covert translation is explicit and logical. She gives a clear explanation of when functional equivalence is achievable and what types of texts can be subject to this analysis. After 35 years since its debut, House's model has become one of the canonical theories on equivalence in translation and it is still broadly discussed and referred to in many publications on the subject.

7. Quotations to remember the text by

"(...) each individual textual case has to be referred to the particular situation enveloping it. This means that a model has to be developed for determining the ST's function and the ensuing comparison of ST and TT's functions." (House 1977: 103-104)

"A covert translation is a translation which enjoys or enjoyed the status of an original ST in the target culture. The translation is covert because it is *not* marked pragmatically as a TT of an ST but may, conceivably, have been created in its own right. (...) An ST and its covert TT have equivalent purposes: they are based on contemporary, equivalent needs of a comparable audience in the source and target language communities." (House 1977: 107)

8. References

House, J. 1977. "A model for Assessing Translation Quality". *Meta* 22:2. 103-109,

