

Quality Assessment of Online Translation Agencies in Iran¹

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Abstract

Despite the increasing emergence of online translation agencies in recent decades, there are few studies on the quality of the services they provide. The purpose of this research is to assess the quality of translation services provided by online translation portals in Iran. To this end, five Iranian translation websites were selected based on their popularity among Iranian users. Each of these agencies was given an article for translation. A critical error analysis of the translation was conducted as well as an examination of other aspects that affect the overall quality of the services provided by each online translation agency, such as translation fees, meeting deadlines, and the usability of their websites. This research sheds some light on how online translation agencies provide services to their clients in terms of quality, cost, and convenience. In addition, the results of this study indicate that, among the translations provided by the selected translation companies, the fastest translation had the lowest quality, while the slowest had the highest quality.

Keywords: Online Translation Services, Quality Assessment, Translation Websites

Introduction

With an increase in the number of online translation agencies in the era of globalization, the quality assessment of translation websites has become a topic of public interest. More people use translation websites than ever, and the quality of service delivered by them is an interesting and practical area of translation quality research. Efforts to understand translation quality and use it for practical purposes

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have often focused on developing a list of criteria for "good" translations. The final goal seems to be to design a standard to be applied to all translations based on target language settings that indicate correct language use (Schmitt, 1998).

According to Holmes (1988), translation quality assessment is part of translation criticism which is a branch of applied translation studies. Translation evaluation is a topic in other disciplines, such as literary studies. Literary studies focuses on literary translation and is largely concerned with the reception of translated texts in the target culture (Frank, 1987).

Lauscher (2000) divided quality assessment models into two main categories i.e. Equivalence-based Approaches and Functional Approaches. Equivalence-based translation theories regard translation "as the attempt to reproduce the source text as closely as possible." (Lauscher, 2000, p. 151). On the other hand, a functional approach to translation evaluation, on the other hand, is mostly based on the assumption that translation is determined by factors related to the target culture and not the source text. Function is negotiated between the translation client and the translator for each translation project. The concept of function also deals with the potential audience and is closely related to the *skopos* theory (Schäffner, 1998).

Reiß (1971) proposes a two-stage evaluation process. : (1) analyzing the target text to assess the appropriateness of using the target language and (2) comparing the source and target texts based on the analysis of the two texts for the degree of equivalence between them.

D'Hulst (1997) proposed a translation quality assessment model which is limited to evaluating texts for specific purposes. The main concern in this model is the fulfillment of the same function of source texts in target cultures. The evaluation of the target text also depends on the sample target text against which the actual target text is compared.

Pochhacker (1994) argues that a translation can be evaluated from a variety of perspectives including, clients, intended recipients, translators, and external observers such as translation researchers, and these factors has have an influence on how the translation would be judged. Moreover, the evaluating person's evaluator's experience and knowledge of translation may have an effect on the quality of translation assessment. Many scholars warned us about the subjective nature of translation quality assessment (René, 2002; Almutairi, 2018; Sofyan & Tarigan, 2019). Although subjectivity in translation quality assessment seems to be

impossible to avoid, its effects can be minimized if researchers apply holistic assessment criteria for grading translations with regard to their quality.

Sofyan and Tarigan's yardstick of the functional holistic model has several advantages over other models. It is an ideal model for evaluating both target text style and translation accuracy simultaneously. The functional holistic model evaluates five aspects of translation including, accuracy, equivalence, skill, function, and style. Each category has a certain amount of scores that the assessor has to give to the translations based on the seriousness of their errors. Clear description of each band score is provided in this model to reduce subjectivity as much as possible. To recap, a reliable translation assessment model should cover various aspects of translation quality as opposed to simply assessing one of these aspects since they all collectively contribute to the overall quality of translation. The functional holistic model developed by Sofyan and Tarigan (2019) seems to address this problem adequately and that is the reason why it has been selected as the assessment model for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

There are several reasons for conducting a study on the quality of online translation services. First, ordering a translation online has become the most common and convenient way to receive translation services; therefore, more and more people are using these online services which means they might be interested in knowing about the quality of the services that are provided to them. Second, this study is an attempt to compare the selected translation websites with regard to quality, cost and speed of their services which could be used as a review for the selected online translation agencies that helps clients choose the most suitable option for their translation projects. Moreover, online translation agencies can use the results of this study to improve the quality of their services and get an idea about how their competitors provide services to their clients.

Research Questions

The focus of the research questions of this study is on the quality of the translation services provided by online translation websites. The two specific questions are:

1. What score does each translation receive for its quality based on the functional holistic model developed by Sofyan and Tarigan?

2. Which online translation agency provides the best services regarding quality, cost and speed?

Method

According to Holmes (1988), there are three areas of Descriptive Translation Study including, product-oriented, process-oriented, and function-oriented research. This study is a product-oriented research based on Holmes' (1988) map of Translation Studies because it deals with translations as products purchased from the selected online translation agencies and examines their services in terms of product quality. The primary goal of product-oriented DTS is to examine the existing translations which according to Munday boils down to "the description or analysis of a single ST-TT pair or a comparative analysis of several TTs of the same ST." (2008, p.10)

Since this study aims to determine the quality of services provided by online translation agencies, 5 well-known Iranian translation websites were selected and the quality of their products were examined based on the functional holistic model developed by Sofyan and Tarigan (2019). There are five factors in this model and each factor has a different weight in determining the total quality of translations. Accuracy accounts for 30%, meaning equivalence for 25%, translation skills for 20%, text function for 15%, grammar and style for 10% of the total quality score. The details of scoring criteria are included in the appendix in at the end of this paper. The judgment of the translations is also based on the model translation of an article named "Montpellier's L'Arbre Blanc Blends Playful Folly with Public Purpose" which is has been translated by Mohammad Aghai. The article is originally written by Stefan Novakovic and published in Azure Magazine.

Moreover, the cost and speed of the translation services were mentioned separately for each online translation agency which enables the readers to compare the selected translation websites in case they want to order a translation. The Five translation portals were selected based on their popularity which were determined by traffic estimation and google search engine ranking as well as the information reported on their websites regarding the number of translators and clients. The selected translation websites are as follows:

Tarjomic: <https://tarjomic.com/>

Transnet: <https://transnet.pro/>

ltrans: <https://itrans.ir/>

Irantypist: <https://irantypist.com/>

Transis: <https://transis.me/>

Tarjomic is the most well-known translation company in Iran which is located at the Advanced Technology Center of Sharif University. According to Tarjomic's website, they have approximately 20,000 translators who provide translation services in more than 30 language pairs. The other translation company which claims to be the largest Iranian translation portal is Transnet. This company has 45,000 translators and 300,000 customers according to their own official website. Transnet or the Iranian Translator's Network was established by some Iranian IT and translation experts with the aim of providing modern translation services. They claim to be the only holder of EN15038 and ISO17100 translation standards in Iran and the only Iranian member of GALA and the European Language Industry Association. Itrans is another popular translation website that currently employs 21,977 translators and has provided services for more than 24,028 clients, 150 companies, and 50 websites. Irantypist employs more than 30,000 translators and typists. Transis has more than 33,000 clients and a translation team with more than 6,200 members.

Results

The quality, cost and speed of the translation services are reported in this section. The answers to the first and second research questions are provided in Table 1 and 2 respectively. The scores representing the quality of the translation services provided by the selected websites are presented in Table 1 and the cost, speed and length of the translations are detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. *Quality of the Translations Based on the Functional Holistic Model*

	Tarjomic	Itrans	Transnet	Irantypist	Transis
Accuracy	10%	13%	24%	19%	19%
Meaning Equivalence	10%	10%	23%	15%	15%
Translation Skill	7%	10%	20%	14%	13%
Text Function	8%	10%	15%	12%	11%
Grammar & Style	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Total	45%	53%	92%	70%	68%

As can be seen in table 1, the highest quality of translation was provided by Transnet and the lowest one was that of Tarjomic. Moreover, Irantypist and Transis provided translation with similar degree of quality. Although Itrans' translation was not on a par with those of Irantypist and Transis, it was better than that of Tarjomic.

Table 2. *Cost, Speed and Length of the Services Provided by the Online Translation Agencies*

	Tarjomic	Itrans	Transnet	Irantypist	Transis
Translation Fee	1,070,000 IRR	768,115 IRR	1,245,000 IRR	221,400 IRR	1,070,380 IRR
Date & Time of Order	October 4, 2022 9:04 p.m.	October 4, 2022 9:54 p.m.	October 4, 2022 9:22 p.m.	October 4, 2022 11:03 p.m.	October 4, 2022 11:21 p.m.
Date & Time of Delivery	October 5, 2022 10:25 a.m.	October 5, 2022 5:48 p.m.	October 6, 2022 10:50 a.m.	October 5, 2022 5:26 p.m.	October 6, 2022 9:05 a.m.
Total Amount Of Time	13 hours, 21 minutes	19 hours, 54 minutes	1 day, 13 hours, 28 minutes	18 hours, 26 minutes	1 day, 9 hours, 44 minutes
Number of Words	540	584	733	596	534

The above table shows some information about the translations provided by each company. Tarjomic was the fastest. In fact it only took them 13 hours and 21 minutes to finish the translation. It is particularly interesting because they received my order at night which means their translator had to pull an all-nighter to finish the work. The Transnet's translator decided to take his time and it took him a day and 13 hours and 28 minutes.

Transnet is the most expensive translation agency among the selected online translation companies and it charged 1,245,000 Iranian Rials. Irantypist, on the other hand, provided the most economical translation.

There were 773 words in the Transnet's translation which makes it the longest translation, and the shortest one was that of Transis which contained 534 words according to Microsoft's word processor.

Discussion

Five translations were assessed in this study with regard to their quality, cost and speed. The original text that was given to the five online translation agencies contained 491 words, but almost all of the selected online translation agencies miscalculated the number of words based on which the translations were going to be priced. The number of ST words calculated by the selected translation websites are briefly listed in the table below:

Table 3. *Number of ST Vocabulary Calculated by the Selected Online Translation Companies*

	Tarjomic	Itrans	Transnet	Irantypist	Transis
Word Count	513	498	498	492	491

Table 3 shows the number of words based on which the price of the translation services were determined. According to the Microsoft word processor, the original text contained 491 words. It is quite surprising that only one of the companies could calculate it with one hundred percent accuracy and it was Transis. This company prudently asks its clients about the number of words used in their source text while they are ordering a translation on its website. Irantypist almost calculated the number of words correctly. Both Itrans and Transnet automatic word counting tool showed 498 words in the source text which means they probably use the same tool or method for counting the number of vocabulary for pricing their services. Last but not least, Tarjomic overestimated the number of words in the original text and I was overcharged for 22 words.

The most striking mistranslation took place in the translation of the selected article's title. Three of the five selected translation websites misapprehended a double-meaning word which was reflected in their translations. The original title and its translations are as follows:

Source Text:

Montpellier's L'Arbre Blanc Blends Playful Folly with Public Purpose

Model Translation for Comparison:

درخت سفید مونپلیه، تلفیق سازه نمایشی با کاربرد عمومی

Tarjomic:

لار بر بلانکدر مونتپلیه، سبکسریباز یگوشانهر ابار فاهعمومیتلفیق میکند

ltrans:

آر بر بلان «درخت سفید» مونپلیه، ساز هتزن ئینیمفر حر اباهد فعمومیت ر کیمی کند

Transnet:

بر جمسکونیدر ختسفید در مونپلیه، تر کیبیاز حسباز یگوشیمضحکو کار بر یهمگانی

lrantypist:

برج L'Arbre Blanc مونپلیه، ترکیبی از یک بنای تزئینی شیطنت آمیز و اهداف همگانی

Transis:

درخت سفید مون پلیه آمیزه ایاز باز یگوشیواهد افعام المنفعهاست

The dictionary provides two definitions for the noun, folly. The first one is lack of good sense or foolishness and the second is a costly ornamental building. The secondary meaning was intended by the author, but unfortunately only two translators paid proper attention to the secondary meaning of the word. Even Transnet which provided the highest quality translation service in this study, failed to translate this tricky title accurately.

Other mistranslations were detected in the translations too and some of the most memorable ones are going to be discussed here. The most careless mistakes were made by Tarjomic when their translator wrote 2012 instead of 2013 and mistranslated 7.5 meters as 5.7. These are clumsy translation mistakes which could be avoided by reviewing. But what adds insult to injury is the fact that I paid for the best option in their translation menu which is called Golden Translation + Revision. Obviously, there had been no revision of any kind.

ltrans provided the second worst translation for the value of their Golden service price. The clumsiest and at the same time most unique mistakes in their translation was the equivalence for the word bar which is even a loanword in Persian and it is commonly used by Iranians nowadays. Despite the fact that it is so hard to misunderstand the meaning of bar in the source text context, their translator thought it meant "iron bar" while it was simply referring to a pub or as Persians call it, a bar.

Contrary to what you might expect, the least expensive translation was not the worst in terms of neither quality nor speed. lrantypist provided its translation

service only for 23% of the price charged by Tarjomic and Transis, yet its quality was way better than that of Tarjomic and on a par with that of Transis which is really surprising. Irantypist also provided a glossary in the footnote which was the icing on the cake.

As you might imagine, the best translation turned out to be the most expensive one. Transnet provided the highest quality of translation; however, it was the slowest one, too. Their translation was head and shoulders above the rest. The only serious mistake was the one in the translation of the article's title which was quite easy to make. The fluency of their translation was exceptionally good and it reads like a beautifully written Persian article. Their anonymous translator deserves a pat on the shoulder.

Transis offers a five-day deadline to protest the quality of its services. Once their translator starts working on a project, they inform you via text message. The translator's name is provided on their website and you can communicate with them, too. Transis gives you various payment options and those who don't have Iranian bank accounts are able to pay via PayPal. The process of ordering translations was the easiest and fastest compared to other four websites. On the other hand, the most outdated, confusing and time-consuming website was that of Irantypist. I had to make several attempts to order a translation and the only payment method was paying by two installments which was really annoying. Itrans also gives its clients a ten-day quality guaranty during which they can contact their team and ask for a retranslation.

Conclusion

The quality assessment of the five selected online translation companies indicates that the most expensive service which was provided by Transnet had the highest value in terms of quality and received 92% based on the functional holistic model (Sofyan & Tarigan, 2019). However, it was the slowest translation which took 1 day, 13 hours and 28 minutes to be delivered. The least accurate translation was provided by Tarjomic which was the first translation agency that finished the translation project. It took them only 13 hours and 21 minutes. The most user-friendly website design was that of Transis because it supported various payment methods including PayPal, and the process of ordering a translation was pretty straightforward. The worst website design was that of Irantypist, but the quality of its translation was surprisingly good, 70%, in spite of being significantly less expensive than the other ones.

The lowest score for the quality of translation was 45% from Tarjomic. The results of this study also revealed that their team didn't provide a high quality translation under supervision of a reviewer as they promised in their Golden + Revision service.

Transis and Irantypist scored 68% and 70% respectively in spite of the huge gap between their translation fees. Itrans scored 52% which is slightly more than what Tarjomic received despite the fact that their service was comparatively less expensive. Moreover, the longest translated text was produced by Transnet which is the most fluent translation, too. On the other hand, the shortest translation was that of Tarjomic. In addition, all five translations were longer than the source text. To recap, we can conclude that the fastest translation was the least accurate, and the slowest one was the best in this study; however, the data is not sufficient for a generalization.

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APPENDIX

The functional holistic model developed by Sofyan and Tarigan

1	Score	Description	Rating
	Accuracy (30%)		
	25–30	There are no identifiable problems of ST comprehension; the original message has been conveyed completely to TL readers without omissions or additions	Score: Note:
	19–24	Virtually there are no problems of ST comprehension except with the most highly specialized vocabulary without any influence on TL readers' understanding; there are some partial omissions and additions	
	13–18	The information is conveyed to TL readers with some difficulty due to the translator's misunderstanding of some parts of the original message; there are apparent omissions and additions	
	7–12	The ideas which are poorly expressed due to numerous serious problems in understanding the ST influence the reader's comprehension of the original message; the TT is difficult to understand	
	1–6	Severe problems greatly influence the reader's comprehension of the original message; TL readers cannot understand the original message conveyed in the TT	

2	Score	Description	Rating
	Meaning Equivalence (25%)		
	20–25	All lexical and syntactic elements have been understood; precise vocabulary is used; words have been chosen so skillfully that the work reads like a good publishable version	Score: Note:
	15–19	Full comprehension and good usage of a wide range of vocabulary and structures are shown in the TT; specialized vocabulary presents some problems with unsuitable equivalents	
	10–14	General comprehension of a fair range of vocabulary is shown in the TT although some gaps are observable; some vocabulary is	

		misused; some evidence of plausible attempts to work around difficulties of finding equivalents, perception, wordplay and other linguistic features	
	5-9	Comprehension of vocabulary and structures shows quite noticeable gaps which obscure sense; there are problems in finding correct vocabulary; the translator is unable to cope with specialized vocabulary	
	1-4	Inappropriate use of vocabulary is very obvious; comprehension of the ST original meaning seriously affects the meaning even with fairly everyday vocabulary and structures; translation as a whole makes little sense	

3	Score	Description	Rating
	Translation Skill (20%)		
	17-20	The TT demonstrates the translator's ability and creativity in finding solutions to translation problems, it shows skillful use of resource materials	Score: Note:
	13-16	The TT demonstrates the translator's consistent ability in identifying and overcoming translation problems, it shows no major errors despite very few minor errors, there are no obvious errors in the use of resource materials	
	9-12	The TT demonstrates the translator's general ability to identify and overcome translation problems, it shows a major translation error and/or an accumulation of minor errors, there are improper or flawed uses of reference materials possibly reflected in the TT	
	5-8	The TT demonstrates the translator's difficulty in identifying and/or overcoming translation problems, it shows several major translation errors and/or a large number of minor errors, there are improper or flawed uses of reference materials reflected in the TT	
	1-4	The TT demonstrates severe problems greatly influencing the reader's comprehension of the original message; the TL readers cannot understand the original message conveyed in the TT	

4	Score	Description	Rating
	Text Function (15%)		
	13-15	The TT meets the text function of the ST; it shows creative inventions and skillful solutions to achieve the function of the ST; it is corresponding to the text function based on the TL perspective	Score:

10-12	The TT almost meets the text function of the ST; there are some inventions to achieve the function of the ST; it is corresponding to the text function based on the TL perspective	Note:
7-9	The TT shows inconsistency in meeting the text function of the ST; an awkward structure in achieving the ST function is obvious; it is not fully corresponding to the text function based on the TL perspective	
4-6	The TT pays less attention to the text function of the ST; it is not corresponding to the text function based on the TL perspective	
1-3	The TT contrasts with the text function of the ST; it is not corresponding to the text function based on the TL perspective	

5	Score	Description	Rating
	Grammar and TT style (10%)		
9-10	The TT needs no improvement from grammatical and stylistic points of view although one or two natural failings might be observed; it shows native-like fluency in grammar	Score: Note:	
7-8	The TT shows a flair for stylistic manipulation of the TL items as if TT were written in the TL originally except where the language is placed under severe pressure of comprehension; it maintains advanced proficiency in grammar; there are some grammatical problems but with no influence on message		
5-6	The TT tends to have awkward grammatical usage in the TL and literalness of rendering, but it does not impede sense in a significant manner; some attempts are performed to reflect stylistic features of the original text; some grammatical problems are apparent and have negative effects on communication		
3-4	The TT shows clumsy TL; it often shows nonsensical grammatical usages in the TL; it sounds unnatural; a little attempt is performed to reflect stylistic features of the original text; there is evidence of clear difficulties in following the style; grammatical review of some areas is clearly needed		
1-2	The TT shows little sense of style which often makes poor sense in the TL; knowledge of grammar is inadequate; the use of the TL grammar is inadequate; severe grammatical problems interfere greatly with the original message		