

Comparative Translation Assessment: Quantifying Quality

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues for the usefulness of quantitative means of comparative translation assessment of literary texts. It presents as its case study a comparative analysis of the classical Russian novel in verse *Eugene Onegin* by Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) and its English translations. The source text has been translated into English 19 times, with 14 versions preserving the poetic form of the original. Prompted by the scope of the project, a formal quantitative technique, the Token Equivalence Method, was designed to gauge certain formal parameters of the distance between the source text and its translations. Based on employing the notion of isomorphism as a logical operator and on taking into consideration certain formal features of the source text preserved in its translations, the method can be described as a simple, flexible, modular, genre- and text-type independent, formal means of comparative translation assessment, capable of performing various comparative translation tasks - a useful addition, despite its reductionist nature, to the tool kit of empirical comparative methods.

The obtained quantitative results were compared with conventional qualitative assessments represented by a number of critical essays. Rooted in the idea that any comparison involves assessment, and any assessment is based on comparison, the study has led to the hypothesis that the results obtained by certain qualitative (judgmental) and quantitative (formal) comparative translation assessment methods of literary texts are not only comparable but in fact converging. This finding may be interpreted as an indication of the complementary nature of both approaches to comparative translation assessment.

The thesis also offers a detailed analysis of the attitudes towards Pushkin's work in Anglo-American literary and academic circles during the last half-century, and traces how his image has been shaped, challenged and transformed through translations. The study also examines the special role played in this process by V. Nabokov's translation (1964). The thesis thus contributes to both translation and literary studies.

KEYWORDS: comparative translation assessment, lexical isomorphism, Token Equivalence Method, Translation Quotient.

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