

**A TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE FIRST THREE
CHAPTERS OF THE NOVEL “MAT MA DA VINCI” BY DO THU HA
(2005) BASED ON J.HOUSE’S MODEL.**

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are various areas in translation among which translation quality assessment is a subject of interest. To what degree a translation text is “good” all depends on a large variety of factors, one of those would be the angle from which the translation text can be looked at. The novel “Mật mã Da Vinci” translated by Đỗ Thu Hà (2005) has raised heated controversy over its translation quality. Therefore, this study is aimed at assessing the translation quality of the first three among 105 chapters in that book based on J. House’s approach of TQA in order to reach the objectives of (1) discovering the features of the source text (ST) and (2) assessing the level of quality that the translation text reaches.

2. DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Theoretical background: House’s TQA Model.

In her model, House adopts Halliday’s terms “ideational” and “interpersonal” as labels for the referential and non-referential functional components.

House’s TQA model consists of specific situational dimensions grouped into two sections: Dimensions of Language User and Dimensions of Language Use, on which the analysis of the ST and TT profile is based.

Dimensions of Language User

Geographical origin

Social class

Time

Dimensions of Language Use

Medium

Participation

Social role relationship

Social attitude

Province

When the source text's and the translation text's profiles do not match, there is an error. House describes two types of errors: COVERTLY ERRONEOUS ERRORS: those which result from a mismatch in one situational dimension, and OVERTLY ERRONEOUS ERRORS: those which result from a non-dimensional mismatch.

Moreover, House introduces a new concept that translator should apply when translating the ST, that is CULTURE FILTER. Culture filter is a means of capturing socio-cultural differences in shared conventions of behavior and communication, preferred rhetorical styles and expectation norms in the two speech communities. It is an important concept for translation criticism because it helps people differentiate between a covert and overt version of translation.

2.2. Findings and results

2.2.1. Profile of the ST

A. Dimensions of Language User

First, the Geographical origin of the text producer is in unmarked form: Standard British/ American English. Second, the Social class of the text's producer is

educated middle class speaker of the standard language. Last, the text’s temporal origin is in the past (2003).

B. Dimensions of Language Use

In terms of **Medium**, the ST is simple, meaning written to be read.

In terms of **Participation**, the ST is complex, which is a monologue with built-in (fictional) dialogic parts.

In terms of **Social role relationship**, there are two types of relationship in the ST:

Author – reader(s): symmetrical.

Author – characters in the text: writer – producer and characters – products.

In terms of **Social attitude**, the ST is consultative and casual.

In terms of **Province**, the original text is part of a thriller fiction which is written for educated readers.

2.2.2. ST and TT comparison

Mismatches on the following dimensions could be observed as a result of a comparison between the ST and TT on the basis of situational dimensions suggested in House’s model.

*** Covertly erroneous errors**

A. Medium: Syntactic means

TT uses some contact which does not appear in the ST and changes in type of phrases such as:

ST	TT
Langdon picked up the receiver. “Hello?” (p.7)	Langdon nhắc ống nghe trả lời : “Xin chào?” (p.7)
Squinting at his surroundings he saw a plush Renaissance bedroom with Louis XVI furniture... (p.7)	Liếc nhìn xung quanh ông nhận thấy đó là một phòng ngủ kiểu Phục Hưng bằng vải lông với nội thất thời Lui XVI... (p.7)

In the example, the verb “trả lời” is added to the end of the first sentence to connect the two sentences. In the second extract, the noun phrases “a plush Renaissance bedroom” was transformed into a subordinate clause “đó là một phòng

ngủ”. This kind of change in TT, to some extent, supports the translator’s aim in explaining and clarifying the situation which is considered not necessary in the ST as well as making the text more familiar to Vietnamese readers.

B. Social role relationship

Regarding the lexical mismatch, the TT differs from the ST in terms of use of pronouns as stated below:

ST	TT
<p>“Did you mount her?” the agent asked, looking over. Langdon glanced up, certain he had misunderstood. “I beg your pardon?” “She is lovely, no?” (p.19)</p>	<p>“Ông đã từng trèo lên trên ấy chưa?” Viên cảnh sát hỏi, liếc nhìn. Langdon ngược lên, chắc chắn ông ấy đã hiểu lầm. “Tôi mong nhận được sự thứ lỗi của ông.” “Cái tháp thật đáng yêu, không phải sao?” (p20)</p>

In the extract above, there is a difference in culture underlying the ST and TT in the use of pronouns. When referring to a thing or an animal, normally the pronoun “it” is preferred; however, in the case that the speaker considers wishes to show his/her affection to that thing/animal, the pronouns “she” and “her” are employed. That phenomenon happens in the sentences above when the agent is proud of the Eiffel Tower. Nevertheless, the TT interprets those pronouns as “trên ấy, trên đó, cái tháp, nó”; hence, the meaning of the words in the ST is not preserved in the TT.

C. Social attitude

The consultative style level of the ST is violated when the translator adds more abundant words to the TT in order to make the text more intimate. This may be caused by the translator’s attempt to create a more natural narrative and to bring the text closer to the Vietnamese writing style. The examples are listed below:

ST	TT
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“Outside the car, the pale wash of halogen headlights skimmed over the crushed gravel parkway...” (p.20)	Bên ngoài chiếc xe, ánh sáng nhạt của những ngọn đèn pha cháy bằng khí halogen hắt xuống con đường rải sỏi nghiền nhỏ. (p.19)
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However, in several cases, the TT leaves out certain parts in the ST, hence making the meaning of the TT less clear than that of the ST and breaching the consultative and casual style level of the ST. For example:

ST	TT	Suggested alternative
“ <i>My French stinks, Langdon thought, but my zodiac iconography is pretty good. Taurus was always the bull.</i> ” (p.23)	“Tiếng Pháp của tôi rất tệ, Langdon nghĩ, nhưng hiểu biết về các hình vẽ miêu tả cung hoàng đạo của tôi thì rất tốt.” (p.22)	“Tiếng Pháp của tôi rất tệ,” Langdon nghĩ, “nhưng hiểu biết của tôi về hình vẽ miêu tả các cung hoàng đạo lại rất tốt.” Chòm sao Kim Ngưu luôn có biểu tượng là con bò đực.

D. Province

In terms of syntactic means, past simple tense is mainly used in the ST, which is proper to a narrative fiction. However, due to specific characteristics of Vietnamese language, the tense markers is not manifested in the TT apart from several sentences in which past simple tense is expressed with the word “**đã**” such as:

+ “Các cuốn sách của ông về các bức vẽ tôn giáo và biểu tượng thờ cúng **đã** làm ông nổi danh một cách bất đắc dĩ trong giới nghệ thuật...” (p.8)

+ “Ông và người quản lý đáng kính Jacques Sauniere **đã** sắp xếp để gặp nhau uống vài cốc bia sau buổi thuyết giảng tối nay của Langdon, nhưng ông Sauniere **đã** không đến. (p.11)

Moreover, in terms of lexical means, the use of lexical items marked [+human] in the ST is not maintained in the TT, which affects the Province of the TT. Below is an example to illustrate the point:

ST	TT	Suggested Alternative
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<p>“Sitting up now, Langdon frowned at his bedside Guest Relations Handbook, whose cover boasted: SLEEP LIKE A BABY IN THE CITY OF LIGHTS, SLUMBER AT THE PARIS RITZ.” (p.8)</p>	<p>Khi đã ngồi dậy, Langdon cau mày nhìn cuốn sổ tay liên hệ với khách hàng được ghi những lời hoa mỹ: Hãy ngủ như một đứa trẻ ở Kinh đô ánh sáng. Hãy thiếp ngủ ở khách sạn Ritz Pari.” (p.8)</p>	<p>Khi đã ngồi dậy, Langdon cau mày trước Cuốn sách hướng dẫn cho Khách với trang bìa khoe khoang: HÃY NGỦ NHƯ MỘT ĐỨA TRẺ Ở KINH ĐÔ ÁNH SÁNG, HÃY NGỦ SAY Ở KHÁCH SẠN RITZ PARIS.</p>
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*** Overtly erroneous errors**

Apart from the mismatches from the ST as discussed above, the TT also presents other breaches which should be taken into consideration.

Firstly, in terms of breaches of the target language system, the TT shows a case of ungrammaticality as can be seen as follows:

ST	TT	Analysis of mistake	Suggested alternative
<p>“The frightening image of the curator's body remained locked in his mind.” (p.17)</p>	<p>Những hình ảnh đáng sợ về thi thể của người quản lý bảo tàng vẫn bám chặt trong tâm trí ông.” (p.17)</p>	<p>Number of noun</p>	<p>Hình ảnh đáng sợ...</p>

Moreover, several cases of dubious acceptability such as literal translation or wrong translation could be observed throughout the TT as follows.

ST	TT	Analysis of mistakes	Suggested alternative
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“ <i>Boston Magazine</i> clearly has a gift for fiction.” (p.10)	“Tập chí Boston rõ ràng đã có một món quà tương tự.” (p.10)	Wrong translation of “gift”	Tạp chí Boston rõ giỏi bịa đặt.
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Secondly, in terms of mistakes in the denotative meanings of ST and TT, the following mismatches could be recognized in the text under the category of wrong selections:

ST	TT	Analysis of mistake	Suggested alternative
“The Citroën swerved left now...” (p.20)	“Chiếc Citroen đi lệch sang bên trái...” (p.21)	Wrong translation of “swerve”	Chiếc Citroen ngoặt sang trái...

3. DISCUSSION: STATEMENT OF QUALITY

From the findings above, it can be summed up that in the light of House’s dimensions, ST and TT have been compared particularly in terms of Medium, Social role relationship, Social attitude, and Province to discover the mismatches. From all the breaches of equivalence made visible by the application of House’s model, the following problems related to covertly and overtly erroneous errors have been recognized.

First, regarding the covertly erroneous errors, there are mismatches on the dimensions as follow. On the dimension Medium, the mismatch derives from the addition of contact which does not appear in the ST and changes in type of phrases, serving the translator’s purpose of making the text more familiar to Vietnamese context. On the medium Social role relationship, the lexical mismatch in terms of use of pronouns could be seen. On the dimension Social attitude, the consultative style level of the ST was infringed more abundant words are added to the TT in order to make the text more intimate. Moreover, in several cases, the TT skips details of the ST, resulting in a loss in meaning of the ST. Although the

difference in style between the ST and TT is of little significance and does unremarkable negative effects on the ST’s pragmatic meaning, it detracts from the interpersonal functional component of the text’s function. On the dimension Province, the fact that the TT hardly uses past simple tense – a typical feature of narrative fiction and bypasses the use of lexical items marked [+human] in the ST with a view to create a fictional style partly affect the interpersonal functional components.

Second, with respect to the overtly erroneous errors, the breaches discovered also detract from the interpersonal functional component. The TT shows several cases of ungrammaticality, dubious acceptability such as literal translation or wrong translation, and translating mistakes in the denotative meanings of the ST. However, under the light of the concept “cultural filter” – a means of capturing socio-cultural differences in expectation norms and stylistic conventions between source and target linguistic-cultural communities (J. House, 2001), the TT, generally, has not totally conveyed both ideational and interpersonal features of the ST.

Despite the mismatches presented above, the TT shows some good translated sections that can convey both interpersonal and ideational features of the ST as follows:

ST	TT
<p>“Pulling his shades, he stripped naked and knelt in the center of his room. Looking down, he examined the spiked <i>cilice</i> belt clamped around his thigh. All true followers of The Way wore this device—a leather strap, studded with sharp metal barbs that cut into the flesh as a perpetual reminder of Christ's suffering. The pain caused by the</p>	<p>“Kéo rèm che, hắn cởi trần ra và quỳ xuống giữa phòng. Nhìn xuống, hắn kiểm tra chiếc dây thắt bằng sợi lông đuôi ngựa được đóng đinh và buộc chặt quanh bắp đùi. Tất cả những môn đồ chân chính của Con Đường đều đeo vật này – một dây da, dập những ngạnh kim loại sắc cứa vào thịt như một sự nhắc</p>

device also helped counteract the desires of the flesh. (p14)	nhờ thường xuyên về sự chịu đựng của Chúa. (p.15)
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In brief, under the light of J. House’s TQA model, the translation text of the first three chapters of the novel “The Da Vinci Code” reveals significant and serious mismatches from the ST. Apart from a few good translated passages, the rest of the TT contains various translation mistakes which seem to be a result of careless translation with little edition. There are breaches in all twenty three pages of the TT; thus, the TT appears to be of low performance and to some extent reduces the positive effects and impressions on readers made by the ST.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1. Recapitulation of main ideas

The controversy over the quality of a translation text has led to the increasing demand for literary translation quality assessment. Correspondingly, this paper is conducted to investigate the quality of the first three chapters in the TT based on J. House’s TQA model.

Firstly, a succinct summary of House’s TQA model was presented. The method employed to carry out this research is qualitative. The ST has been analyzed in the light House’s model. The part Findings and Discussion has answered the two questions proposed at the beginning of the study. First, a concise overview of the original text has been presented, followed by different features of the ST analyzed based on House’s model. Second, a comparison between the ST and TT reveals a large number of mismatches both in terms of Covertly erroneous errors and Overtly erroneous errors. It is stated that the TT has failed to meet the assessor’s expectations and to totally convey the interpersonal and ideational features of the ST.

4.2. Limitations of the study

In spite of all that, there are several limitations of the study. As stated in the introductory section, the study has been confined only to the translation quality assessment of the first three chapters of the novel “Mật mã Da Vinci” by Đỗ Thu Hà (2005) based on House’s TQA model. In terms of text, the paper has only investigated a small proportion of the whole TT (three over 105 chapters). In addition, due to typical characteristics of House’s model, not all the features of the ST have been reviewed. Moreover, because the data is limited to only three chapters, the low performance of the TT may not stand for the quality of the whole book. In addition, the TT has only been looked at under J. House’s TQA model whereas there are other models proposed by different theorists. Thus, as fully done as the title of the research may suggest, the study has not been exhaustive.

4.3. Recommendation for further research

Due to the limitations stated earlier, several follow-up studies can be implemented to cover the areas which are not included in this thesis. One would be the application of House’s model to a large number of chapters or the whole novel “Mật mã Da Vinci” to properly investigate the quality of the whole TT. Such a study could attempt to identify the strengths and drawbacks of the TT; thence a suggestion could be proposed to revise the translation book to bring a better and more equivalent translation to the readers.

Another study could be done by applying other TQA models such as Hatim & Mason’s or Peter Newmark’s to evaluate the quality of the TT. That study would be worth doing to provide a quality assessment report of the TT according to different perspectives.

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