

The Differences between Direct and Indirect Translation: An assessment of two translations of the Japanese novel Black Rain

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Abstract

Although indirect translation (translating a translated text) has always been a common practice in literary translations and other types of translation, it has only recently gained attention as a subject of study in the field of translation studies. The present paper attempts to shed light on the differences between direct and indirect literary translation by analyzing translations of the Japanese novel, **Black Rain** as a case study. There are two different translations of this novel into Persian; a direct one from Japanese and an indirect one from Russian. Juliane House's translation quality assessment model (House, 1997; 2001; 2015) was used to compare the two translations. The main findings show that the direct translation was a relatively overt translation, transferring cultural elements from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), while the indirect translation used "cultural filters" to make cultural compensations for SL cultural phenomena in TL. Furthermore, House divides translation errors into two groups, namely, overt and covert errors. The analysis revealed that there were no covert errors in the direct translation, while the indirect translation contained a covert error. House further divides overt errors into 'mismatches of the denotative meanings of elements of the source and translation texts' and 'breach of the target language system'. The former were much more frequent in the indirect translation, while the latter were slightly more frequent in the direct translation.

Keywords: indirect translation, translation studies, translation quality assessment, Japanese language, **Black Rain**

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1. Introduction

Indirect translation is one of the least-studied areas in translation studies. Some authors do not discriminate between direct and indirect translations in their works, and some consider indirect translation as unacceptable and doomed to failure. This paper tries to elaborate on the differences between direct and indirect literary translation by comparing two translations of the Japanese novel, **Black Rain** as a case study. There are two different translations of this novel into Persian; a direct one from Japanese and an indirect one from Russian. The present study employs Juliane House's translation quality assessment model to compare the two translations and to highlight their differences.

2. Literature Review

This study applies Juliane House's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model (House, 1997; 2001; 2015) to two available translations of the Japanese novel **Black Rain** (a direct one and an indirect one) in order to evaluate the quality of these translations. House's assessment model provides the means for the analysis and comparison of an original text and its translation on three different levels: Language/Text, Register (Field, Mode and Tenor) and Genre. House categorizes the translation errors into two groups, namely, covert and overt errors. House further divides overt errors into two categories: A) mismatches of the denotative meanings of elements of the source and translation texts which includes omissions, additions and substitutions (i.e. wrong selections or wrong combinations of elements) and B) breach of the target language system which includes cases of ungrammaticality and cases of dubious acceptability. This model has frequently been employed to compare two or more existing translations of a text (e.g. Seyed-Jalali et al, 2017).

3. Methodology

There are two different translations of Ibuse Masuji's 1966 novel (**Black Rain**) into Persian. This novel was first translated into Persian by Karim

Keshavarz in 1978 from a Russian translation of the book. Keshavarz in the translator's preface indicates that he has also referred to an English translation of the book where necessary. More than three decades later Ghodratollah Zakeri translated this novel into Persian again, this time directly from Japanese. This novel is set immediately after WWII and is divided into 20 chapters. The first page of each chapter was marked in the source (Japanese) text, then based on Juliane House's model, the corresponding pages in the two translations were investigated for all kinds of covert and overt errors.

4. Results

The investigation of the two translations revealed that there were no covert errors in the direct translation, while the indirect translation contained a covert error. The results also showed that the mismatches of the denotative meanings of elements of the source and translation texts were much more frequent in the indirect translation, while the breaches of the target language system were slightly more frequent in the direct translation. Table 1 summarizes the main findings of this study.

Table 1: The frequency of overtly erroneous errors in the two translations

Error type		Indirect	Direct
Mismatches of the denotative meanings of elements of the source and translation texts	Omissions	356	13
	Additions	44	6
	Substitutions	31	3
Sum:		431	22
Breaches of the target language system	Ungrammaticality	0	4
	Dubious acceptability	1	12
Sum:		1	16

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study revealed that the direct translation was a relatively overt translation, transferring cultural elements from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), while the indirect translation used “cultural filters” frequently to make cultural compensations for SL cultural phenomena in TL.

The number of omissions, additions and substitutions in the indirect translation was far beyond the expectations. On the other hand, the indirect translation was a more natural and fluent writing due to fewer cases of ungrammaticality and dubious acceptability. Therefore, a reader who does not have access to the original Japanese text may find the indirect translation more pleasant to read. The findings of this study may not be applicable to all indirect translations, but it more or less shows the characteristics and tendencies of the two types of translations.