

# Developing a Holistic Model of Translation Quality Assessment

Rudy Sofyan\*, Bahagia Tarigan

Linguistics Department  
University of Sumatera Utara  
Medan, Indonesia  
\*rudy@usu.ac.id

**Abstract**—Quality is the ultimate goal of any translation practices. However, a quality translation is always debatable for different methods of assessment, widely known as translation quality assessment (TQA). The issue of relativity and subjectivity is apparent in many TQA models. This study aims at developing a holistic TQA applicable for assessing translation from English to Bahasa Indonesia. This study used a research and development method. The data were both primary and secondary data. The primary data were the results of the interview and forum group discussion (FGD), and the secondary data were the research report. The data were analyzed using an interactive model. The findings of this research indicate that: (i) TQA should be based on a holistic method, (ii) a holistic-based TQA model should provide clearly distinguishing quality criteria, and (iii) the TQA model developed in this study assesses both translation and linguistic skills. This study concludes that a good TQA should cover the whole criteria of quality translation from both the translation and the linguistic aspects.

**Keywords**—holistic method; translation quality; TQA; translation from English into bahasa Indonesia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Translation quality assessment (TQA), by which the translation quality is graded, becomes a central issue in a product-oriented translation and gets more attention from both translation scholars and experts. A number of studies have been conducted to apply certain TQA models [1-4], to test the effectiveness of certain TQA models [5-7] or to develop new TQA models [8-13].

In addition, the relativity [14] and subjectivity [7] make the issue of TQA become even worse. Mossop claims that there is no absolute quality in translation since relativity of translation quality is obvious [14]. Likewise, Almutairi argues that subjectivity in TQA cannot be eliminated, but it can be minimized [7]. Besides, Sofyan and Tarigan found that the TQA model used by different raters in assessing similar translation resulted in different quality [15]. In fact, the results of using the same TQA model in assessing the same TT should show the similar level of quality of the TT although assessed by different raters. Such different results indicate that there is a problem in the assessment process which may come from either the selected TQA model or the raters or both. In other words, such problem may be caused by two factors: (i) the

subjectivity in the application of the TQA model, and (ii) the inadequate distinguishing quality criteria in the TQA model.

As mentioned by Almutairi that subjectivity cannot be eliminated, the possible solution to arrive at a more representative quality in TQA is by revisiting the quality criteria used in previous TQA models [7]. This study aims at developing a holistic TQA model in assessing translation from English into bahasa Indonesia. This study is expected to minimize the relativity and the subjectivity in the TQA.

## II. METHOD

This study used a research and development method. The research was conducted to get the qualitative data concerning the application of previous models of TQA. The research results were then used as the basis of developing the new TQA model. The data were both primary and secondary data. The primary data were the results of the interview and focus group discussion (FGD), and the secondary data were the research report. The participants were the translation scholars and experts. The interview and FGD, as the instruments of data collection, were conducted to examine the effectiveness of applying three TQA models as documented in the research report done by Sofyan and Tarigan [15]. The three models were Hurtado's error analysis-based TQA model [9], Waddington's holistic method-based TQA model [11], and Nababan's holistic method-based TQA model [13].

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis show that Hurtado's model has some strengths and weaknesses [9]. It is a good model for evaluating both translation and grammatical skills; however, it is less effective when used in assessing long texts. The model assesses the translation based on error analysis. The errors are classified into either serious error penalized with (-2) points or minor error penalized with (-1) point. In addition, the model also provides plus points for good solutions (+1 point) and exceptionally good solutions (+2 points) to translation problems. Such scoring system allows longer texts to have more minus points than short ones because the longer the texts are the greater number of errors they possibly contain. The texts in (1) and (2) are the good examples.

(1) ST: Each of these clashes defined an era of Internet history. Apple vs. Android is no different. Everyone agrees that the struggle for Internet advantage is shifting to the mobile realm, and iPhone and Android have surged to the front of the pack with diametrically opposed business models. Neither of these players will be vanquished anytime soon — these battles take years to play out — but the company that gains the upper hand will be best positioned to take advantage of the massive structural shift from desktop PCs to smartphones and tablets.

TT: *Setiap perselisihan ini didefinisikan dalam era sejarah Internet. Apple vs. Android tidak ada bedanya. Setiap orang setuju bahwa perebutan pada keuntungan Internet telah bergeser ke ranah mobile, dan iPhone maupun Android telah melonjak kepada kumpulan terdepan dengan model bisnis yang bertentangan. Tak satupun dari pemain ini akan dikalahkan dalam waktu dekat. Persaingan ini memakan waktu bertahun-tahun lamanya, namun perusahaan yang meraih keuntungan terbesar akan berada pada posisi terbaik untuk meraih keuntungan atas pergeseran struktural masif dari desktop PC ke ponsel pintar dan tablet.*

(2) ST: In the 1990s, Microsoft Internet Explorer battled Netscape Navigator in the great Web-browser wars. In the 2000s, Google and Yahoo locked horns over Internet search — and we know how that turned out. Today, the latest high-stakes tech conflict is between Apple’s iPhone and Google’s Android mobile operating system for supremacy in the smart-phone market.

TT: *Pada tahun 1990-an, Microsoft Internet Explorer bersaing dengan Netscape Navigator dalam perang peramban web terbesar. Pada tahun 2000-an, Google dan Yahoo bersitegang dalam penelitian Internet dan kita tahu yang sebenarnya. Saat ini, konflik teknologi terbaru yang berisiko tinggi adalah antara Apple iPhone dengan sistem operasi mobile Google Android untuk supremasi di pasar ponsel pintar.*

The target text (TT) in (1) contains seven errors (the underlined words indicate the errors), four of them are classified as serious errors (penalized with -2 points) and the other three belong to minor errors (penalized with -1 point), so the total (-11) points are obtained. Meanwhile, the TT in (2) contains only four errors which all belong to serious errors, so the total (-8) points are obtained. The results of error analysis explicitly show that the TT in (2) has a better quality than the TT in (1). However, this result needs to be carefully evaluated since other factors (e.g. the text length) might cause different points. When the number of errors is compared to the number of clauses, the TT in (1) has a smaller percentage of errors, meaning that it has a better quality.

However, error analysis is very effective in improving the quality of translation since it identifies every error in the TT. This is in line with Presada and Badea who believe that error analysis can be a very effective means for students’ English

language acquisition and skills improvement, including translation skill improvement [16].

Meanwhile, the results of data analysis concerning the use of Waddington’s and Nababan’s models show that their models were developed on the basis of a holistic method. Although the models are considered more representative than the error analysis-based model, their quality aspects need to be developed. Waddington’s TQA model describes the translation quality in general, by providing qualitative descriptions for each quality level. The problem is that the score range is so broad that it highly possibly leads to subjective assessment. The quality description provided in table 1 is an example of how a TQA might raise subjectivity.

TABLE I. LEVEL 4 OF TRANSLATION QUALITY

Level	Accuracy of transfer of ST content	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of task completion	Mark
4	Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires a certain amount of revision to reach a professional standard.	Large sections read like a piece originally written in English. There are a number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Almost completely successful	61-80

Source: [11]

The score range (61-80) says that the translation within the score of 61, 62, ..., 80 has the same level of quality description. However, there is no clear evidence to give a score of 62 to a translation, while 64 or 67 to others. The clauses in (3) are good examples:

(3) ST : Native Americans have first claim on the Yellowstone Plateau and lived in the area in peaceful tranquility until the early 1800s--undisturbed by the presence of white men.

TT1 : *Penduduk asli Amerika pertama sekali memiliki klaim atas Yellowstone Plateau dan tinggal di daerah itu dengan damai sampai pada awal tahun 1800an--tanpa diganggu oleh kehadiran orang kulit putih.*

TT2 : *Penduduk asli Amerika merupakan orang pertama yang mengklaim tinggal di Dataran Tinggi Yellowstone dengan penuh ketenangan hingga awal 1800an--tanpa adanya gangguan dari orang kulit putih.*

The TT1 and TT2 in (3) use different lexicogrammatical features indicating the translators’ different understanding of the source text (ST). The decision to keep the ST phrase “Yellowstone Plateau” in TT1 is caused by the translator’s understanding of “Yellowstone Plateau” as a proper noun, usually serving as an unchangeable term. This is partly correct since “Yellowstone” is the name of a certain place in America; however, the other word “Plateau” is not a proper noun because it can be found in any part of the world, and it is equivalent in meaning with “Dataran Tinggi” in the target language (TL) as used in TT2. In addition, there are also some

TL grammatical errors found in TT1. Therefore, TT1 is categorized, based on TQA model in Table 1, as an almost completely successful translation.

The TT2 in (3) is also categorized as an almost completely successful translation since it contains few insignificant inaccuracies caused by a misunderstanding of the ST. For example, the TT2 considers “Yellowstone Plateau” as the circumstance of the process “lived” despite its role as the participant of the process “have first claim” in the ST. Nevertheless, such inaccuracy does not significantly change the meaning originally conveyed in the ST. The problem occurs in determining the score for both of the TTs since it is not fair to give the same score (e.g. 61) for both. This case motivates the assessors to perform their subjectivity by giving the higher score for the TT they like better.

In addition, the model presented in table 1 also shows that the translation quality is determined by only two factors, i.e. meaning accuracy and grammatical correctness. Other factors need to be considered, especially when referring to the nature of translation as one of the forms of a written text. Any piece of writing is produced in order to be read; therefore, a TQA should also consider whether the TT is readable. Besides, as the target reader of any TT is TL reader, a TQA should also consider whether the TT is acceptable to the TL reader in terms of its lexicogrammatical features (diction, cultural terminology and prevailing grammatical rules). These two factors have been included in the TQA model proposed by Nababan et al. [13].

Nababan’s model is also developed based on a holistic method, completing two main weaknesses in Waddington’s model. This model has tried to reduce subjectivity and relativity in TQA by treating the aspects of quality (the so-called accuracy, acceptability, and readability) differently. Accuracy, focusing on the quality of the meaning transfer, is considered the most important aspect of quality, determining 50% of translation quality. Meanwhile, acceptability is related to whether the lexicogrammatical features used in the TT are acceptable to TL readers, determining 33% of translation quality. The other aspect, readability, is related to the language style used in the TT confirming the easy understanding of reading the TT by TL readers, determining 17% of translation quality. Although it has completed the missing quality aspects in the Waddington’s model, it is also still unable to minimize subjectivity and relativity in TQA.

Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that a representative TQA should be developed based on a holistic method [11,13], because translation quality cannot be assessed simply from one of its aspects since all of the aspects collectively constitute a good quality of TT. This supports Williams who argues that the TQA must be completed with a holistic assessment. However, the translation aspects in TQA should be made more specific by adding two more quality aspects, i.e. translation skill and text function [17]. Besides, each of the aspects has to be given a different proportion considering their role in achieving the translation quality.

Accuracy, regarded by many experts as the most important aspect in TQA [18,13,7], determines 30% of the translation quality. Accuracy confirms the translator’s complete

understanding of the ST and his/her ability to transfer such understanding into the TT without additions or omissions.

As translation is a meaning-making activity [19,20], meaning equivalence realized in understandable lexical and syntactical elements determines 25% of translation quality. Meaning equivalence is closely related to the term “acceptability” proposed by Nababan et al. [13].

In translation process, every translator will certainly encounter problems related to highly specified terminology [21] and TL structure [22]. A good translator should have the ability to find good solutions for such problems, known as translation skill. The importance of finding good solutions to translation problems has been mentioned by Hurtado who includes it as one of the determining factors in TQA. In this study, considering such importance, translation skill determines 20% of the translation quality [9].

Furthermore, any TT should represent the same social function with its ST. A narrative text, for example, whose social function is to entertain readers through fictional stories or events, should be translated as a narrative text corresponding to its social function prevailing in the TL. The aspect of text function determines 15% of the translation quality.

The other aspect of translation quality is grammatical correctness and stylistic acceptability which facilitate the readability of the TT. Although these two features do not play an important role as the other four previous quality aspects, frequent grammatical errors can reduce the reader’s interest to read the text. Besides, such errors will cause difficulties for readers to understand the text. In this study, grammar and style determine 10% of the translation quality (the complete TQA model developed in this study can be seen in the Appendix).

In addition, it was also found that a holistic-based TQA model should be developed by providing clearly distinguishing quality criteria for each quality aspect. In the model developed through this study, each quality aspect is distinguished under five levels. For example, 30% of translation quality for an accuracy aspect means that its range score is from 1 to 30. Within this range, five levels of accuracy are described together with their scores as illustrated in table 2.

TABLE II. ACCURACY DESCRIPTION IN THIS TQA MODEL

Score Range	Description
	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
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

Based on the accuracy criteria descriptions provided in table 2, the subjectivity and relativity in TQA can be minimized. All of the assessor's scores are accountable because they are guided by clearly distinguishing quality criteria. They will have stronger reasons for any score they give to the TT quality. Without such guidance, different assessors might arrive at different quality results of the same assessed TT.

As described in table 2, the translator's comprehension of the ST is the absolute requirement to get the highest score (30) of accuracy, because only with a good understanding of the ST will a translator be able to convey the ST original meaning in the TT. In addition, the highest score of accuracy can only be achieved if the TT does not delete or add any information in the TT that will affect the original message to be conveyed. Any additional description is necessary as a guidance of filling the score range between 25 and 30. When omissions or additions of information are found in the TT, the highest score of accuracy will be 24. The same descriptions are also applied to the other levels of accuracy as shown in table 2. The complete description of this TQA model can be seen in the Appendix.

Moreover, the results of the analysis also show the absolute need of both translation and linguistics skills which become the basis of developing this TQA model. This model provides quality descriptions of translation skill criteria as can be seen in table 3.

TABLE III. TRANSLATION SKILL DESCRIPTION IN THIS TQA MODEL

Score Range	Description
<i>Translation Skill (20%)</i>	
17-20	The TT demonstrates the translator's ability and creativity in finding solutions to translation problems, it shows skillful use of resource materials
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

Based on the quality descriptions provided in table 3, in addition to the ability to find good solutions to a translation problem, a translator is also required to be skillful in using resource materials. Corresponding to the advanced technology, Rosa, Sinar, Ibrahim-Bell, and Setia [20] and Sofyan and Tarigan [15] suggest the use of online resources as the means of translation problem-solving. Rosa found that professional translators frequently used online resources while doing their tasks [23]. Besides, Rosa et al. also found that pauses are not only the indicator of cognitive processes, but they also indicate

social affective processes because during pauses translators also communicate with other people through their published works. This idea supports online resources as the best resource materials to solve translation problems [20].

The translation skill aspect described in table 3 shows that the highest score of showing good translation skill is 20. This means that without a good solution to translation problems, it is impossible for a TT to be graded as a good quality. Besides, good solutions indicate that the TT produced does not contain any errors in terms of its terminology and lexicogrammatical features.

Meanwhile, the linguistic skills are particularly reflected in the text function and grammar and style aspects. The TT should successfully represent the text function of the ST, reflected in the generic structure and lexicogrammatical features used in the text. The description of the text function aspect is provided in table 4.

TABLE IV. TEXT FUNCTION DESCRIPTION IN THIS TQA MODEL

Score Range	Description
<i>Text Function (15%)</i>	
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
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
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

The aspect of text function is a new aspect of TQA developed in this study. This aspect is developed because several translations with good quality are, in fact, not corresponding to the ST text function. As translation is a process of finding meaning equivalence [24], the equivalence should also involve the text function. As the text function determine 15% of translation quality, the highest score for the TT meeting the ST text function is 15.

The TQA model developed in this study corresponds to the nature of translation, i.e. translation is a skill and there will be no any translation practice without the use of language. In addition, translation as a meaning-making activity is also realized through a language. Therefore, assessing translation quality means assessing the languages involved in the translation, as translation always involves at least two different languages [25].

Furthermore, the involvement of at least two languages in translation means the involvement of two different cultures. In other words, assessing the translation quality must consider the culture transfer from one language to another language. This supports Bandia who argues that translation is both intercultural and intralingual activities [26]. The addition of text function as one of the evaluated aspects in this present

TQA model is used to accommodate the role of culture in translation. The cultural nuance of the TL should be reflected in the TT, which makes the TT acceptable by the TL readers. This supports Glodjovic who confirms that content and language present in the SL context should be fully acceptable and comprehensible to the TL readership [27].

In addition, the text function aspect can reveal the typical characteristics of TL structure, leading to the naturalness of the TT. This supports previous studies on translation trying to reveal the typical characteristics of text in the TL. Sofyan and Tarigan [28], for example, reveal the theme characteristics of Indonesian news item texts through translation studies. Naturalness has become one of the quality criteria of assessing translation in several TQA models [13].

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The need for a more representative TQA model is motivated by the presence of relativity and subjectivity in a TQA. The TQA model developed in this study tries to minimize them in order to perform an objective TQA. This model prioritizes accuracy as the aspect of quality realized through good translation and linguistic skills, and the combination of which results in five translation quality aspects: (i) accuracy; (ii) meaning equivalence; (iii) translation skill; (iv) text function; and, (v) grammar and style. To make the TQA objective, each of the aspects is given descriptions of distinguishing quality criteria divided into five levels.

This newly developed TQA model has not been tried out; therefore, it is suggested for translation assessors to use this model as a tool for TQA. The results of such application will be very helpful to improve this model.

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**APPENDIX**
**The functional holistic model developed in this study**

<b>1</b>	<b>Score Range</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Rating</b>
		<i>Accuracy (30%)</i>	
	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:
	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	Note:
	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	
<b>2</b>	<i>Meaning Equivalence (25%)</i>		
	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:
	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	Note:
	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	
<b>3</b>	<i>Translation Skill (20%)</i>		
	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:
	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	Note:
	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	
<b>4</b>	<i>Text Function (15%)</i>		
	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	
<b>5</b>	<i>Grammar and TT style (10%)</i>		
	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:
	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	Note:
	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	