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Abstract

This is an applied study that critically analyzes the Arabic-English translation of a key cultural text: the biography of the Prophet Muhammad entitled *The Sealed Nectar*. It aims at assessing the translation to see how successful the translator was in composing an equivalent text to such a culture-specific one. The study adopts Juliane House's (1997) translation quality assessment model which is based on Systemic Functional Linguistic theory and relates texts to their situational and cultural contexts. In order to introduce a qualitative judgement of the work, the study enhances House's model to make it applicable to culture-bound texts that call for *overt translation*. It introduces a consilience of: 1) Nord's notion of culturemes; 2) Nida's categorization of cultural features to help in analyzing religious terms and culture; 3) Dickins et al.'s compensation strategies that show the translator's endeavor to balance the translation loss while dealing with such *sensitive terms*; 4) Martin and White's appraisal theory which explores attitudinal meaning and, hence, helps in investigating the translator's evaluation of these terms; and 5) Katan's model that helps in highlighting the correlation between levels of cultures and discourse variables (field, mode and tenor). Application of the enhanced model reveals mismatches on all the discourse variables which indicate the application of a cultural filter that adopts the norms of English academic discourse, in addition to overt errors that distort the message of this sensitive text. The study thus complements House's framework of translation quality assessment and introduces a model that can be further applied to assess overt translations.

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