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**PHD IN PHILOLOGY**

**QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF MACHINE TRANSLATION OUTPUT  
FOR LEGAL TEXTS: AN ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL ERRORS FROM  
ENGLISH INTO ROMANIAN**

**Summary Thesis**

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## **Background**

Translation and especially online automated translation is available almost everywhere and people rely on it frequently, either as laypersons in the field of translation or as translation experts. The automated tools are used in the translation industry and on the translation market as support for translators, to speed up the translation process and manage to meet deadlines and client requirements. The same tools are also used by translation scholars for various research purposes, such as for this study.

The translation project involves other stages as well, which occur either before the translation or after the translation. The processes which occur after the translation are for instance editing the translation or in case of automated translation post-editing the resulted output. The editing and post-editing processes are actions intended to correct any errors which might have occurred during the translation. They represent an important stage in the translation process, before the translation is delivered to the client.

What matters for delivery is the quality of translation, yet the notion of translation quality is highly complex. There may be different degrees of translation quality just like there are different perspectives on translation quality. However, translation scholars devised manners of assessing translation quality by various means. Their methods took the form of non-quantitative translation quality assessment and quantitative translation quality assessment. The former focuses on various means for achieving translation quality and a proper assessment. The latter relies on error counting and providing the translator with metrics, grids, tables, calculations and formulas.

## **Aims of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to test the efficiency of an automated machine translation tool such as DeepL in its free version on an English legal corpus as source text. Another aim is the application of a quantitative translation quality assessment model on the target text, in the form of Multidimensional Quality Metrics, abbreviated as MQM. A further aim is to uncover the degree of subjectivism observable during translation quality assessment, whether or not such quantitative models such as the MQM manage to lead to a significant reduction of subjectivity in favour of objectivity.

## Methodology

The theoretical part of the study is provided first to offer the necessary informational background before the application of the theory in the Case Study.

The features of automated translation systems were briefly discussed to offer an idea about the basic functioning and application of such systems. Afterwards, the focus was on translation quality, its degrees and types, translation errors and translation rankings. These were followed by a selection of non-quantitative and quantitative translation quality assessment models, with focus on the quantitative models and especially on the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM).

This was also supplemented with translation theories we considered most relevant and applicable for the study. Furthermore, beyond translation theory, another important aspect is that of specialized language, namely legal language. The last chapter of the theoretical part presents the main features of both the English and the Romanian legal language, because the corpus compiled for this study is a legal corpus.

The choice of the automated translation system was DeepL and it was used in its free version. As for the source text to be translated by DeepL, it is a legal corpus composed of four legal cases. The legal cases were taken from the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom website and were chosen according to their subject matter: pollution and the nuisance resulting from it, the release on licence of terrorist offenders, the VAT imposed on selling a land and the continuation of trust linked to statutory land.

The corpus contains four legal cases, the number of which was chosen for the purposes of granularity, also considering the time constraints for the present study. The source text was translated by the free DeepL version, but in a fragmented manner. The target text was checked multiple times, for detecting errors in translation, but also to determine what error categories could be established.

The resulting error categories were *Accuracy* and *Terminology*, with their own subcategories of *Accuracy-Untranslated Word/Phrase* and *Terminology-Wrong Term/Phrase*, respectively *Inconsistent Use of Terminology*. The errors were also subjected to error analysis and to a quantitative translation quality assessment model. In the course of error analysis, specialized online sources were used to determine whether a particular item is an error and to support the translation solutions.

Both the error typologies and the error calculation model were based on the Multidimensional Quality Metrics (MQM). Adjustments were necessary in the course of further error categorization and for calculation purposes. For the calculation of the overall translation quality the main categories of *Accuracy* and *Terminology* were given further subcategories, in the form of thematic subcategories such

as *Legal Institutions/Bodies*. What resulted were categories such as *Accuracy - Untranslated Legal Acts* and *Terminology- Wrongly Translated Legal Bodies*, among others.

The *Accuracy-Untranslated* errors were discussed and provided in table format, while the terminology errors were extensively analysed and grouped according to their thematic field. Worth mentioning here is that not all errors were linked strictly to the legal domain (for example *exchange of pleadings*), some belonged to other domains, such as real estate (for instance *freehold*) while others belong to the common language such as *site*.

This thematic organization of errors under Terminology served as support for the calculation from the final part of the study. The calculation was inspired by the formula proposed by the Multidimensional Quality Metrics, yet it was adapted for the purposes of this study. Namely, what the MQM proposes is an excel-based calculation scorecard containing many formulas which is automatically adjusted. However, this study relied neither on automated extraction nor on automated calculation tools, instead for the whole part on manual tasks. The search tool provided by Microsoft Word was the single tool used for calculating the number of errors in the translation.

The calculations were performed for each legal case in the corpus before providing a final calculation score for the whole corpus. These calculations were preceded by error categorizations in table formats, linked to the predominance of the given errors in the corpus and corresponding severity levels. The inclusion of the severity level is based on the idea of error weight, which means the impact a particular error has in the target text.

## **Organization of the Study: Thesis Structure**

The study is structured into two parts: the first part is dedicated to theoretical frameworks while the second part of the study is represented by the case study. The first part of the study, named *Theoretical Part*, contains four chapters, the first one dealing with automated translation, the second and third ones with translation theory and the final one concerns the English and Romanian legal language. The second part, titled *Case Study*, is organized into: the methodological steps used for the case study, with the presentation of the used tools and of the corpus, the obtained results and their interpretation.

Automated translation tools have been part of the translators' toolbox for certain time, ever since the possibility of automated translation was envisaged. The first chapter, titled *Features of Automated Translation Systems with Focus on Neural Translation*, presents a brief development of *machine translation*. The result of such development is reflected in the several types of machine translation

systems: the rule-based machine translation (RBMT) in the 1950s and 1960s, certain applications in the 1970s (MÉTÉO system for instance), the example-based machine translation (EBMT) of the 1980s (based on corpus examples). These were followed by a boom in the 1990s, with the advent of free online tools for translation, computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools as well as the statistical machine translation.

The two main criteria which were sought were accuracy and fluency, achieved only with the arrival of the neural machine translation, which represented a great leap from the previous machine translation types. The neural type of machine translation derived its functioning from previous systems such as the statistical machine translation type, but it also relies on a system of learning, in a manner similar to neural networks. However, there are still problematic linguistic phenomena for the neural type of translation such as polysemy, homonymy, ambiguity, grammatical features, but also matters of register and terminology.

Another important aspect of the study is that of *translation quality*, its levels and degrees with reference to translation, which is dealt with in the chapter ***Perspectives on Translation Quality with Focus on Quantitative Translation Quality Assessment***. The chapter presents the concept of quality, as a complex and elusive concept. There are many types of translation quality as well as many degrees of quality, as envisioned by translation scholars. In the academia, translation quality represents an uncertain (so-called “fuzzy”) notion because of the uncertainty surrounding its definitions.

Scholars differ in their views, with some linking quality to the success of the target text, others to the quality of content and readability. Other criteria for the quality of a translation are acceptability, functionality but also accuracy and fluency. For certain scholarly networks such as the Translation Automation User Society (TAUS) translations the target is the near-human translation, which highlight the importance attributed to human translators and their work.

Translation quality and its possible level are also affected by aspects external to translation. These are the increase in translation demand, the greater availability of translation, which may lead to both an increase and a decrease of the desired quality levels.

Every translator is justified in aiming for an adequate translation, but in the wrong for aiming for a perfect translation, which obviously does not exist. The subjective factors inherent in any translation are represented by the translator’s individuality (their unique style in translating) as well as their skills and personality. However, there are efforts to decrease the level of subjectivity in favour of objectivity.

To achieve a high level of objectivity the evaluator needs specific instruments which help them, for instance grids, standards or metrics. Moreover, such methods must be supplemented with translation errors identified in the assessed translation. Translation errors are defined in various manners, either as a deviation, a defect in translation, a failure to adhere to translation instructions, broadly speaking anything which affects a translation and its successful delivery.

Translation analysis is equally important in translation quality assessment because it involves identifying the causes of translation errors. Such errors may arise due to difficulties in understanding the source text (either due to the translator's competence or because of the text itself), time pressure because of the work environment (tight deadlines), a lack of or a reduced translation competence. Additionally, scholars offer various classifications of translation errors or translation problems, which reflect the aim of wanting to achieve better systems of translation assessment.

The simplest error typology concerns the division between language or linguistic errors and transfer errors, or errors of meaning. Another simple error typology belongs to Anthony Pym, who classified translation errors into binary errors, either a right or wrong option, and non-binary errors, which imply multiple choices, not just the choice between two options. For Tomás Conde language errors can be detected when reading the target text, but translation errors can be discovered when comparing both source and target text. There are also many other more complex error classifications, such as the classifications performed by Martínez Melis and Hurtado Albir, Federica Scarpa.

*Error gravity* is another important concept in translation assessment. This gravity is given not only by the nature of the error but also its impact on the target text. Moreover, errors are classified according to their gravity into minor, major and critical. Minor errors have fewer consequences than major ones and the most serious error types are the critical errors, because these could lead to legal consequences for the translator or translation company.

Scholars differ in their classification of translation errors into minor, major or critical ones. For Anthony Pym binary errors are high-risk, because there is a wrong choice involved in translation, whereas non-binary errors are low-risk, given that all options are correct. For Dancette and Hurtado Albir the most serious errors are source text errors of meaning and target text errors of coherence and cohesion.

Such error classifications are useful in determining the *ranking* of a whole translation per se and support in error quantification. A translation may receive several rankings, which range from A to D,

depending on the degree of necessary revision, from an A ranking, where no revision is necessary to a D ranking, where delivery is not possible and retranslation is necessary.

As for the phrase *translation quality assessment*, it is usually used in business, referring to a post-delivery type of revision and comprising a quantification of results. It is linked to translation project management, as opposed to other activities such as revision, which is part of the translation process.

There are both non-quantitative and quantitative approaches to translation quality assessment and although our focus is on quantitative assessment models, a study of such models is insufficient if it does not consider the translation ideas by scholars such as House, Reiss, Vermeer and Nord. We included House with her overt versus covert translation distinction, Reiss focus' on text typologies, while for Vermeer the most important is the Skopos or aim of the translation, and for Nord the emphasis is on functionalism and starting the translation process with a source text analysis.

The translation industry required metrics, because in their absence translation assessment risked being subjective. This prompted research into creating new metrics. Examples of systems using metrics which were developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century are: SEPT (Système d'évaluation positive des traductions), Sical (Canadian Language Quality Measurement System), LISA QA Model (Localisation Industry Standards Association) SAE J2450 (Society of Automotive Engineers), and the TAUS DQF-MQM (Translation Automation User Society Dynamic Quality Framework Multidimensional Quality Metrics). What all these metrics have in common is the inclusion of error types, error weights, error gravity, metrics and calculation formulas. They all feature both advantages and disadvantages, yet the system which is based on previous systems to offer an improved and universally adaptable version is the TAUS DQF-MQM.

The system, developed by the QT LaunchPad project and can function both as pre- and post-translation tool and features two variants (Core and Full MQM) which differ in terms of number of error subcategories and level of detail. The chosen typology for this study is the Core MQM, which contains *Terminology, Accuracy, Linguistic conventions, Style, Locale Conventions, Audience appropriateness, Design and Markup and Custom*. Concerning error gravity, the newest MQM version (from 2023) features a classification into Neutral, Minor, Majority and Critical errors, depending on their impact on the target text. Furthermore, this newest MQM variant features a calculation spreadsheet with many components and several complex calculations as well as an acceptability threshold, meaning a passing score for a translation.

While the progress performed by scholars in creating models for translation quality assessment was crowned with significant results, one must not forget that despite their granularity and high adaptability, such models were not without drawbacks. There is actually no universal approach to a complete elimination or significant reduction of subjectivity in translation assessment. Subjectivity remains an inherent part of any translation assessment, which can be seen in the adaptations performed by translators and evaluators during translation quality assessment.

The next chapters focus further on theory considered relevant for the study: a selection of translation theories as well as the features of legal language for both English and Romanian, in preparation for the Case Study.

For the chapter ***Translation Theory and Its Relevance for Machine Translation Analysis*** we selected translation theories most relevant for the translation of our Case Study. From the whole body of translation theory we relied on early theories, for example which contrast literal translation with translating meaning-for-meaning, but also on the concept of equivalence and strategies for lack of equivalence.

Equivalence remains the desired outcome during translation. Every time the translator comes across an element which requires a translation solution there is a lexical gap which must be solved. Just like quality, equivalence remains a complex aspect in translation theory, mirrored in many classifications of equivalence, for example Eugene Nida's distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence.

It is difficult to achieve translation equivalence in translation at times, especially in the legal domain (Juliette Scott, Anne Lise Kjaer) and there may be no possibility of complete equivalence (Jean-Claude Gémar). Thankfully, there are numerous strategies for dealing with non-equivalence. These strategies were taken from Mona Baker's coursebook *In Other Words* and from Vinay and Darbelnet's *A Methodology for Translation* on translation strategies. There can also be a combination of strategies to obtain the intended effects and provide solutions for lexical gaps.

The last theoretical chapter is titled ***Translation Theory Selection including Legal Translation Theory*** and deals with legal translation and legal language. Legal translation aims at achieving the same effect in the target text as in the source text (Jan Engberg), or the same meaning potential (Pelage). It is particularly difficult because legal language is a specialized language. To achieve this, the translator needs to be equipped with certain abilities and also manifest certain competences, such as understanding

the source language, have the necessary knowledge about the source text and target text so as to compare them (Prieto Ramos).

Generally language features a degree of uncertainty, yet legal language manifests even a higher degree of uncertainty because of legal concepts. This uncertainty can be seen in instances of indeterminacy or vagueness, given that there are concepts which allow more than one interpretation. Legal concepts are complex and may be very difficult to translate, but there are solutions for such cases as well, for instance those expressed by Deborah Cao: 1) either create new words, in the course of which you may introduce new meanings or 2) use close or partial equivalents.

Moreover, legal translation is linked to the legal systems it pertains to. There are eight major groups of legal systems, yet the most influential ones are the Common Law, such as in England and Wales and the Civil Law, such as in France or Romania. There are many differences between the Common Law and the Civil Law, the translator should be aware of them during translation. These differences refer to particularity versus generality, the level of text comprehension, the fact or relying or not on previous cases (the precedent) or on judicial principles, primary judicial resources and the legal institutions.

Just like any other specialized language, the English legal language has many unique features which help differentiate it from ordinary, non-specialized language. The same thing is applicable for the Romanian legal language. These features are grouped into semantic features, grammar features (including syntactic ones) but also structural and pragmatic features, depending on the case.

## **Case Study and Results**

The second part of the study is the Case Study, titled ***Case Study: Analysis of Machine Translation Quality from English into Romanian of a Legal Corpus (49.337 Words)***. It contains the results of the application of the MQM metric on a legal corpus. The corpus contains these four legal cases from the website of The Supreme Court United Kingdom: *Jalla and another (Appellants) v Shell International Trading and Shipping Company and another (Respondents)*, *Morgan and others (Respondents) v Ministry of Justice (Appellant) (Northern Ireland)*, *Moulsdale t/a Moulsdale Properties (Appellant) v Commissioners for His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (Respondent) (Scotland)*, and *R (on the application of Day) (Appellant) v Shropshire Council (Respondent)*.

The corpus contains terms which belong to the legal domain, but also to certain subdomains of the legal domain such as tort law, property law, domains which intersect themselves with legal domains such as the financial domain as well as non-legal domains (construction, pollution).

Each legal case contains both general and specific legal terminology: *Jalla v Shell* revolves around the issue of a nuisance following pollution (oil spill), *Morgan v Ministry* around terrorist offenders being released on licence and the concept of release on licence, *Moulsdale v Commissioners* on a property sale and the inherent subjection of that sale to VAT and finally, *R v Shropshire* on the continuation of trust upon selling a statutory land.

The legal cases differ not only in terms of length and domain and corresponding terminology, but also in terms of error quantification results. The average passing score was that of 86.25%, however this assessment excludes other MQM-based typologies which constitute the MQM Core (e.g. *Verity/Linguistic conventions, Style*), and other subcategories as featured under *Accuracy* and *Terminology*. Three out of the four legal cases managed to achieve an acceptable quality score and could therefore pass the acceptability threshold imposed on translations. Moreover, the allotted severity weights also contributed to the translation assessment.

Nevertheless, no matter the error classification, equivalence remains of paramount importance for this study. Despite the differences between the English and the Romanian legal system (Common Law versus Civil Code) the equivalents between the two languages were sought. Furthermore, the translation solutions served as corrections for the errors identified in the target output issued by DeepL.

The translation quality assessment was performed with the help of an adjusted system, which features certain types of errors but also calculation formulas. The objective part of the study is supported by the process of error quantification and calculation, yet there is also a subjective component, represented by the adaptation of the MQM error typology and the MQM-based calculation formula, but also by the scores attributed to the legal cases, which contribute in the end to an error score for the whole corpus, with focus on *Accuracy* and *Terminology* errors.

Additionally, lack of automation and any complex calculations was counterbalanced by a degree of approximation and adjustments. This approximation represents a testimony to the adaptable nature of the MQM translation quality assessment and the inherent subjectivity of any translation quality assessment.

## **Advantages, Limitations and Future Directions**

On the one hand, the study managed to achieve a high level of granularity due to the focus on not more than several legal cases. It succeeded in the application of the MQM typology in terms of *Accuracy* and *Terminology* errors and also an application of an MQM-inspired calculation. On the other hand, the study has its share of limitations: the calculation not being performed in its entirety, the inclusion of adjusted severity weights which might constitute a subjective element, the exclusion of translation rates such as the word-error rate.

The above limitations as well as other drawbacks could be addressed in future studies which use this research as a starting point. Other more extensive studies could be undertaken, which can be either quantitative or combine impressionistic with quantitative assessments to obtain mixed models. Automated tools could be included in the study to provide support for researchers and help with the achievement of more precise and objective quantifications and calculations.

Furthermore, future studies could also apply either the Core or the Full MQM Typology on a corpus, either a legal one or any other domain would be welcome. Perhaps future studies could even apply other quantitative translation quality assessment models, such as those which contributed to the MQM development, such as the LISA QA or the SAE J2450 metric.

For a legal corpus, a jurilinguistic research could be carried out, with the inclusion of a comparative law step. The corpus length could be adjusted as desired, depending on the available time and automated tools and the desired level of granularity for the study. The case study could also focus on strings of items such as phrases, expressions or even idioms. These can be analysed in much greater detail and here automated tools can be put to use for more objective calculation methods.

In the domain of linguistic research, the study and especially the corpus and its proposed translation could be helpful for a linguistic analysis, for a course on legal linguistics, a (legal) translation seminar, a translation seminar for specialized English language. The translation of the legal corpus could be a starting point for other translations, be they human (translations done from scratch, perhaps even divided between several translators) or automated (via other translation tools).

Another possible use of the study is an analysis of error severity in the domain of cognitive linguistics, because the severity would imply a certain effort to provide corrections, but also perception, what happens in the translator's or editor's mind. With regard to corrections, these could be linked to the necessary post-editing effort performed by the post-editor after translation.

All in all, considering the above suggestions, any limitations or any suggestions for improvement for the current work could be addressed in the future, in the form of further research, conducted in other domains which verge with linguistics, such as comparative jurilinguistics, cognitive linguistics, even neurolinguistics and computational linguistics.

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