

# TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT BY NEWMARK'S MODEL WITH TRANSLATION LEARNING

Tran Thi Trung Hieu

## Abstract:

*Translation quality assessment (TQA) has recently become an issue that attracts concerns and attention in Vietnam. Peter Newmark even emphasizes the crucial role of translation criticism and translation learning. The author's realistic writing style expands learners' knowledge and understanding of their own and the foreign language and helps them sort out their good ideas about translation. This paper clarifies subjective assessment remarks on the translation "You Must Live" – by Bac Hoai Tran based on Peter Newmark's model of translation assessment and its implications for translation learning.*

**Keywords:** *Translation quality assessment (TQA), Peter Newmark's model, translation learning*

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## Introduction

Issues on translation quality assessment (TQA) have always grabbed much attention in translation studies. The assessment of translator performance is an activity which, despite being widespread, is under-researched and under-discussed (Hatim and Mason 1997: 199). That has become one of top priority among **well-known translators. According to Peter Newmark**, translation criticism is an essential link between translation theory and its practice. More obviously, translation criticism is an essential component in a translation course because it painlessly improves your competence as a translator; it expands your knowledge and understanding of your own and the foreign language, as well as perhaps the topic and it will, in presenting you with options, help you to sort out your ideas about translation. (*Peter Newmark, 1998, A Textbook of Translation, Chapter 17, p.184*).

Recently, there has been a raising concern about translations and translation criticism in Vietnam. Although there is no research to reflect the alarming situation of translation in Vietnam, a number of articles, either formal or informal have been posted on many websites. These articles, although not academic, provide us with various valuable opinions from famous scholars in the translation field. Through their ideas, we can view the current status of translation, literature translation in particular, as follows: (1) The three principles of translation are translating, editing and criticizing but the only thing we can do is to translate (Critic Pham Xuan Nguyen, the chairman of Hanoi Writers Association), (2) Inconsistence in the translated version occurs frequently when the original text is divided into many parts translated by different people. (3) The translators now are given too much freedom in translating and creating the new version without respect to the original text. (4)

\* MA, Foreign Trade University, HCM City campus; Email: hieu.tran@ftu.edu.vn

Many translators are not qualified enough and do not acquire a thorough understanding of the work (context, author, readers, etc.) before translating it. (5) There is no organization responsible for assessing the quality of translation. Take the story “A Boy in the Forest” by Edna O’Brien (printed in *The New Yorker* – December 4, 2002) for an example. The translator Nguyễn Văn Chiến in “Thằng bé nơi cánh rừng” highly respects the content of the origin; however, that some slangs in the original text were incorrectly translated really confuses the readers. In details, “I can’t - he’s underage. *Someone got their knickers in a twist*” was translated into “Tôi không thể làm gì được đâu vì nó chưa đến tuổi trưởng thành. Có người đã mang quần chần của họ đến thành bó rối”. In fact, “To get your knickers in a twist” (slang) means “nổi giận; buồn rầu”.

In this paper, first, I would like to briefly introduce Newmark’s model of translation quality assessment (TQA) and apply Newmark’s model to assessing the translation of “Anh Phải Sống”; then, to generalize the overview of the story and its summary. Finally, I will draw out some implications for translation learning and translation quality assessment.

### 1. Newmark’s TQA model

Scholars have proposed various models of translation quality assessment such as non-comparative (Toury 1978) and comparative (Newmark (1988), Nord (1991), Steiner E (1998), and House (1977, 1997). In what follows, I will present Newmark’s model. Newmark’s TQA model is evaluated superior to other TQA models in terms of realistic applications. The translator easily follows some steps in the process of Newmark’s model because they come from real experiences of the translator, which reflect some issues related to his/her interest. Meanwhile, in

terms of theory, this model consists of general theoretical foundations in TQA, especially some factors involved in translation process are communicative but not textual. All things considered, the quality of the translation “Anh phải sống” from Vietnamese version into English version will be assessed by Newmark’s model.

Newmark’s model of criticism (Newmark, 1988: 186-8) includes the analysis of the source language (SL) text, a comparison of it and the translation, and comments on the translation’s potential role as a translation. The comparative study is the heart of this model (Newmark, *ibid*: 188). His five-part model is as follows:

- 1) a brief analysis of the SL text stressing its intention and its functional aspects;
- 2) the translator’s interpretation of the SL text’s purpose, his translation method and the translation’s likely readership;
- 3) a selective but representative detailed comparison of the translation with the original;
- 4) an evaluation of the translation: a) in the translator’s terms, b) in the critic’s terms; and
- 5) where appropriate, an assessment of the likely place of the translation in the target language culture or discipline.

## 2. The story: “You Must Live”

### 2.1. General view

“You Must Live” reflects a consistent theme in Khai Hung’s fiction: the strengths of human character. Like many of his stories, it challenges the roots of traditional Vietnamese society and advocates the need to recognize individual rights and freedoms. In this story a peasant couple, at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, finds society to be devoid of compassion for their poverty, like an

indifferent river. The vicissitudes of peasant life and marriage relationships are important themes for other Southeast Asian writers, including P.H Muhammad Abdul Aziz in “The Plankway” (Negara Brunei Darussalam).

## 2.2. The summary

The story starts in a summer afternoon on the Yen Phu Dike, telling about a peasant couple, at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, finds the society to be devoid of compassion of their poverty, like an indifferent river. Thuc-Lac gave birth to three children in time of hardship, with scarce work and low wages. That fact forced them to try a little of this, a little of that. They labored endlessly day after day, not able to support themselves or their children. Hard life pushed them into risk. During flood season, the assistant Thuc unexpectedly stumbled on a new way of making a living. He borrowed some money to buy a small bamboo boat. The two of them took it out daily to catch driftwood in the middle of river. However, in this year of poverty, the floodwaters came again but flowed powerfully, as if it wanted to yank loose the small island in the middle of the river. Painfully thinking of their poor little children, the couple began to guide the boat towards the middle of the river, with Thuc steering and his wife paddling. They struggled against the force of the current, fighting to turn the bow upstream. But the boat was swept downriver, bobbing up and down in the silty water. The boat was almost full and soon sinking. Thuc and his wife felt as if they had fallen into an abyss. Thuc saw that his wife was close to the point of exhaustion, so he swam over to her. Thinking only of the children, Lac had silently released her hold on him and sunk to the bottom of the river, allowing her husband to swim to the bank. The story ends with deep

implications “In all its immensity, the water of the river continued to flow, indifferently.”

## 3. Subjective assessment of “You Must Live” by Bac Hoai Tran

### 3.1. A brief analysis of the source language (SL) text

The short story “You Must Live” (in “Virtual Lotus - Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia” – The University of Michigan, p.279-283) is translated by Bac Hoai Tran from the origin *Anh Phải Sống* - Khai Hung (in “Tuyển tập truyện ngắn *Anh Phải Sống* - Nhà xuất bản “Đời Nay” - Hà Nội, 1937, p.7-13). The readers of Virtual Lotus care much about Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia and literary translation.

“**You Must Live**” reflects a consistent theme in Khai Hung’s fiction: the strengths of human character. Like many of his stories, it challenges the roots of traditional Vietnamese society and advocates the need to recognize individual rights and freedoms. In this story, a peasant couple, at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, finds society to be devoid of compassion for their poverty, like an indifferent river. The vicissitudes of peasant life and marriage relationships are important themes for other Southeast Asian writers, including P.H Muhammad Abdul Aziz in “The Plankway” (Negara Brunei Darussalam).

### 3.2. The translator’s interpretation of the SL text’s purpose

In general, the translator Bac Hoai Tran highly respects the content of the source text; in fact, no paragraph has been ignored. Language used in target text seems not to be much changed in comparison with one in the origin. Most slangs are successfully translated into English although some should be changed to meet the author’s implications. (Those will be mentioned later).

### 3.3. Detailed comparison of the translation with the original text

The Target Text consists of 5 pages (from page 279 to page 283) published in “Virtual Lotus - Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia” –

The University of Michigan Press translated by Bac Hoai Tran and Courtney Norris in 1934. Meanwhile, the Original Text includes 7 pages (from page 7 to page 13) published in “Tuyển tập truyện ngắn *Anh Phải Sống* - Nhà xuất bản “Đời Nay” - Hà Nội in 1937.

**Table 1. Comparison between the translation and the original**

STT	Target Text		Original Text		
1	The title	You Must Live	Nhan đề	Anh phải sống	
2	The whole story	You	Toàn truyện	Anh, mày, mình	
3	Page 279	Flowing powerfully	Trang 7	cuồn cuộn chảy	
4		Bobbing		nổi lên bèn	
5		fixed his gaze upon		đăm đăm nhìn	
6		Walking away slowly		đi lững thững	
7		rush by		phăng phăng	
8		Smiled a rather vague smile		cười vờ vắn	
9		So that's the way it is, huh?"		Trang 8	thế à?
10		<b>Không có trong bản dịch</b>			rắn rỏi
11	Obeying	Ngoan ngoãn			
12	Page 280	Rundown house		Gian nhà lụp xụp	
13		Crowded together		Lúc nhúc	
14		Weeping and sobbing		Khóc lóc	
15		Mother		Bu	
16		Quiver		Mếu máo	
17		Urged		Luôn mồm	
18		She urged her sister Be, “You go look for Mom and tell her to come home and feed him” <b>Liên dòng kèm ngoặc kép</b>		Trang 9	Cái Nhớn luôn mồm bảo cái Bé: - Mày đi tìm bu về để cho em nó bú. <b>Xuống dòng, gạch đầu dòng.</b>
19		Glinted			Long lanh
20	“Oh dear! I haven't had anything to eat. There's no milk for you, my child”	- Nao ôi! Tôi chả có gì ăn, hết cả sữa cho con tôi bú!			
21	<b>Meanwhile, the house had become quiet</b>		<b>Không có trong bản gốc</b>		

22	Page 280	Had been chased: <b>bị đuổi theo</b>	Trang 9	đuổi ra đường
23		Her unsophisticated, unimaginative <b>mind</b> , the plain country <b>woman</b>		<b>Bộ óc</b> chất phác của chị nhà quê giản dị, không từng biết trông tượng
24		A jumble		Chen chúc
25		Her maiden name Lac		<b>Cái</b> đi Lạc, tên tục chị phó Thúc
26		Her life		<b>Cái</b> đời chị
27		An apprentice: người học việc		Phó ngõa
28		Teased: trêu ghẹo		Câu nói đùa đi, câu nói đùa lại
29		Page 281		There had been nothing tranquil to speak of in the empty lives of these two miserable human beings. Their misery only grew when they had three children in three successive years
30	On top of that <b>Không có như trong văn bản gốc</b>		Lại thêm	
31	forcing them to try a little of this, a little of that		Loay hoay chần vặt nhau suốt ngày này sang ngày khác	
32	With scarce work and low wages		không có trong văn bản gốc	
33	Spend unconcernedly		Ăn tiêu thừa thãi	
34	deliver a likelihood		<b>cái</b> ăn	
35	Very softly putting her son down		Se sẽ đặt con nằm yên	
36	The wind was as strong as ever		Gió to vù vù	
37	Howling fiercely		Dữ dội	
38	Flapping noisily		Kêu bành bành	
39	In a panic	Hoảng hốt		
40	Watched quietly	Đăm đăm		
41	Scowled	Trùng trùng		
42	“Why didn’t you stay home with the boy?” He scolded her	Thức trùng trùng nhìn vợ, cất tiếng gắt: - Sao không ở nhà với con?		
43	Stammered	áp úng		
44	Page 282	“If it’s so dangerous, then <b>let’s</b> brave it together”	Trang 11	- Nguy hiểm <b>thời</b> nguy hiểm cả

45	Page 282	Okay	Trang 11	Được
46		<b>Inkwell</b>		<b>Nghiên sơn</b>
47		Bobbing up and down		Khi nhô khi chìm, khi ẩn khi hiện
48		As if the whole world was coming apart		<b>Idiom</b> “trời long đất lở”
49	Page 283	It was only a moment, but to Lac it felt like <b>an eternity</b> .	Trang 13	Một lát, một lát nhưng Lạc coi lâu bằng <b>một ngày</b>

### 3.4. Implications for translation learning and translation quality assessment

In terms of translation learning as well as other language skill improvement, learners can acquire much from the author's realistic writing style. The writer succeeds in

description of fierce nature as the reflection of hard life and the strength of human character to struggle against the fact. He makes use of a variety of descriptive language with noun phrases in collocation (Article (a/an) + Adj + Noun) and verb phrases ((adv) + verb + (adv)) such as:

Target Text		Original Text	
Page 279	flowing powerfully	Trang 7	cuồn cuộn chảy
	Bobbing		nổi lên bênh
	fixed his gaze upon		đăm đăm nhìn
	walking away slowly		đi lững thững
	Rush by		phăng phăng
	Smiled a rather vague smile		cười vờ vẩn
Page 280	Rundown house	Trang 8	Gian nhà lụp xụp
	Crowded together		Lúc nhúc
	Weeping and sobbing		Khóc lóc
	Mother		Bu
	Quiver		Mếu máo
	Glinted	Trang 9	Long lanh
Page 281	Spend unconcernedly	Trang 10	Ăn tiêu thừa thãi
	Very softly putting her son down		Se sẽ đặt con nằm yên
	The wind was as strong as ever		Gió to vù vù
	Howling fiercely		Dữ dội
	Flapping noisily		Kêu bành bạch
	In a panic		Hoảng hốt
	Watched quietly		Đăm đăm
	Scowled		Trùng trùng
	Stammered		ấp úng

In addition, I would like to refer **other implications for other skill acquisition**. Hereby, it is mentioned that these noun phrases and verb phrases can make sense in improving

**writing skill** in descriptive essays or narratives. Accordingly, **speaking skill** through main characters' dialogue or conversation in spoken language may work well.

**For example:**

Target Text		Original Text	
Page 280	She urged her sister Be, "You go look for Mom and tell her to come home and feed him"	Trang 8	Cái Nhón luôn mồm bảo cái Bé: - Mày đi tìm bu về để cho em nó bú.
	"Oh dear! I haven't had anything to eat. There's no milk for you, my child"	Trang 9	- Nao ôi! Tôi chả có gì ăn, hết cả sữa cho con tôi bú!
Page 281	"Why didn't you stay home with the boy?" He scolded her	Trang 10	Thức trùng trùng nhìn vợ, cất tiếng gắt: - Sao không ở nhà với con?
Page 282	"If it's so dangerous, then let's brave it together"	Trang 11	- Nguy hiểm thời nguy hiểm cả

In Vietnamese version, in each case the character Thuc uses each pronoun to make conversations with his wife "mày, mình", sometimes "without any pronoun" to express different emotions of deep love, care, worries, and even anger. However, in English version, only "you" is expressed in a complete sentence, which does not show all of the writer's implications.

**In terms of translation quality assessment**, I would like to introduce Newmark's model of criticism to assess the translation "You Must Live" by Hoai Bac Tran from the origin "Anh Phải Sống" of Khái Hưng. Among the comparative TQA models, Newmark's model has generally been regarded as the most appropriate to evaluate translation quality in comparison between the target text and source text of the short story "Anh Phải Sống".

### Translation's assessment

*a) in the translator's terms*

#### Strengths

In general, the translator Bac Hoai Tran highly respects the content of the source text; in fact, no paragraph has been ignored. Language used in target text seems not to be much changed in comparison with one in the origin. Most slangs are successfully translated into English although some should be changed to meet the author's implications. (Those will be mentioned later). In detail, the translation sounds native, especially in the main characters' conversations.

For example:

#### - **Mình đã thổi cơm chưa?**

is translated into "Have you made dinner yet, dear?" This way of translation reflects the atmosphere of late afternoon in the short story meanwhile in other translations, which I have read for compare and contrast, this sentence is often transferred into "You cooked the rice?"

Or

#### - **Thế à?**

We often wait for “really?” in translation but in the target text, the translator chooses “**So that’s the way it is, huh?**” That means Bac Hoai Tran can touch the source text’s meaning. This is not the simple question but

the rhetorical question for the character Thuc to assure and decide to take risks.

Moreover, Bac Hoai Tran also succeeds in sending cultural messages from the origin to the target.

Target Text		Original Text	
Page 280	An apprentice: người học việc	Trang 9	<b>Phó ngõa</b>
Page 282	“If it’s so dangerous, then <b>let’s</b> brave it together”	Trang 11	- Nguy hiểm <b>thời</b> nguy hiểm cả
	<b>Inkwell</b>		<b>Nghiên son</b>

“Phó ngõa”, “thời”, “nghiên son” - the language used in the 1930s period, is effectively translated into English. It is hard for readers to understand these terms if they do not know well about Vietnamese culture at that time.

### Weaknesses

In terms of vocabulary, the writer succeeds in using a lot of “từ láy” to describe fierce nature as the reflection of hard life and the strength of human character to struggle against the fact such as “cuồn cuộn, lờ đờ, lênh bênh, dăm dăm, lũng thũng, phẳng phẳng, vợ vắn, ngoan ngoãn, lụp xụp, lúc nhúc, mếu máo, long lanh, chen chúc thừa thãi, se sè, vù vù, dữ dội, âm âm, bành bạch, hoảng hốt, dăm dăm, trùng trùng, áp úng”. Meanwhile, English used in target text is expressed in the form of noun phrases and verb phrases like 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 24, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, which cannot reflect the effectiveness of many “từ láy” in Vietnamese.

In Vietnamese, the character Thuc communicates by different pronouns to express different feelings of love “mình” and anger “mày” or the character Lac reacts by “anh”. However, all “mày, anh, mình” are only replaced by “you” in English, which cannot reflect all the states of emotion of two main characters. Besides, both 15 and 45 share the same case. Sometimes, “you” is hidden in the origin but still appears

in the translation, which decreases the bitter anger of the character Thuc like 42. Moreover, in 48, “an eternity” replaces “một ngày”, which slightly exaggerate the origin’s sense.

In terms of grammar and sentence structure, suggested structures in the target text appear not suitable enough to show off what the writer means like 22, 23 and 29 “Chased” means “bị đuổi theo” in the dictionary but not reflect all the meaning of “bị đuổi ra ngoài” in the origin, “bộ óc chất phác nhà quê” is expressed by “the plain country woman”, “unsophisticated” unnecessarily supports “mind” in the translation version. “Their misery only grew” also does not help the reader wholly catch “càng...càng” comparison in Vietnamese.

In terms of expression, some words in source text are not fully mentioned in target text such as 10, 14, 17, 25, 28, 31 and 47. In Vietnamese version, Khai Hung refers “hết sữa” with his implication “there’s no milk left” but not “there’s no milk” as Bac Hoai Tran translates. Pitifully, the idiom “trời long đất lở” is only replaced by “if the whole world was coming apart”. In contrast, the translator also adds more words that do not appear in the origin like 21, 30, and 32.

Moreover, there are some untranslatable terms as 26 and 34, “cái” in “cái đời chị” and “cái” in “cái ăn” are only translated into “her life”



and “deliver a likelihood”, which cannot hold cheap the main characters’ life.

#### b) in the critic’s terms

- By analyzing some strengths and weaknesses of the translation “You Must Live”, on the behalf of the researcher of Vietnamese-to-English TQA, I would like to synthesize some main points:

- The translation consists of 5 pages in “Virtual Lotus - Modern Fiction of Southeast Asia” – The University of Michigan, which generally succeeds in sending messages from the author of the origin.

- The translator is fully experienced in Vietnamese-to-English translation. He owns a good range of vocabulary, linguistics knowledge and cultural awareness. The translator himself is Vietnamese but lives and studies in English speaking countries for so long; that fact results in the success of natural translation.

However, some technical mistakes seem to be unavoidable because of some following reasons:

- It is said that “Phong ba bão táp không bằng ngữ pháp Việt Nam”. Therefore, some expressions in Vietnamese turn out untranslatable in English as listed above.

- English grammar is totally different from Vietnamese grammar, so it is hard to require wholly equivalence between two versions.

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#### 3.5. Assessment of translation as an independent story

On the behalf a reader, reading the translation “You Must Live”, I have enjoyed a moving short story, easy-to-understand language, no technical terms, messages and implications of the author of the origin effectively work. Through the language of the translation, I still feel not only linguistics values in translation and communication but also cultural values in behavior. That is the behavioral culture of happy marriage relationship, responsible parenthood, greatly parental sacrifice, and magic power over poverty. The writing style seems simple but emotional and enthusiastic and it makes the success of the short story.

#### CONCLUSION

After applying Newmark’s model of criticism to assess the quality of “You Must Live” by Bac Hoai Tran, it can be concluded that this translation generally owns a good quality of translation procedures and language. It is relevant in the content compared with the origin, fluent in expressions, natural and easy-to-understand in language. Nonetheless, it will be more highly-respected if the translator cares some of listed improvements. Here just come my subjective assessments based on one particular model of TQA. I hope this paper can contribute a little to issues of quality of literary translation assessment and translation learning in Vietnam. □