

Assessing The English Version Of "The Sorrow Of War" Using Waddington's Method C

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ABSTRACT

Literary translation plays a crucial role in disseminating Vietnamese literature to a global audience. This study aims to assess the English version of Bao Ninh's novel "The Sorrow of War," translated by Phan Thanh Hao and edited by Frank Palmos, using Waddington's Translation Quality Assessment model, specifically Method C. Method C employs a holistic approach to evaluate the translation based on the accuracy of transfer from the source text to the target text, the quality of expression in the target language, and the degree of task completion. The analysis reveals that while the translation reads like a piece originally written in English, there are inaccuracies in the transfer of content that require thorough revision to reach a higher quality. The overall degree of task completion is deemed adequate. Besides, the study highlights the importance of semantic translation in literary works to ensure the accurate representation of the source text's meaning, style, and cultural nuances. The findings would contribute to the development of translation quality assessment frameworks and emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach in evaluating literary translations.

Key words: Literary Translation, Translation Quality Assessment (TQA), Waddington's Method C, Vietnamese Literature, "The Sorrow of War"

INTRODUCTION

Literary translation plays a vital role in bridging cultural gaps and promoting the global dissemination of literature. It allows readers to access and appreciate literary works from different languages and cultures, fostering cross-cultural understanding and enriching the literary landscape (Haque, 2012)¹. In the context of Vietnamese literature, translation serves as a gateway for introducing Vietnamese works to an international audience, showcasing the richness and diversity of Vietnamese culture and history (Nguyen, 2014)². Bao Ninh's "The Sorrow of War," a semi-autobiographical novel, has gained international recognition for its unique perspective on the Vietnam War from a North Vietnamese soldier's viewpoint. The novel's non-linear structure and exploration of war's psychological aftermath have contributed to its critical acclaim (Tran, 2019)³. Furthermore, translated into various languages, the novel has reached a global audience, with the English version, translated by Phan Thanh Hao and edited by Frank Palmos, being widely read and acclaimed worldwide. However, the quality of this translation is crucial in conveying the original work's complex themes of memory, loss, and war's enduring impact (Trieu, 2022)⁴. "The Sorrow of War" thus presents an ideal

case for translation quality assessment, offering insights into the challenges of translating culturally rich and structurally complex literary works.

To assess the quality of literary translations, various models and frameworks have been developed. Among them, Waddington's Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) model has gained significant attention. Waddington's model offers a comprehensive approach to evaluating translations, taking into account different aspects such as accuracy, fluency, and overall effectiveness (Waddington, 2001)⁵. Method C, in particular, employs a holistic approach that considers the translation as a whole, assessing the accuracy of transfer from the source text to the target text, the quality of expression in the target language, and the degree of task completion (Waddington, 2001)⁵.

This study aims to apply Waddington's Method C to assess the English version of "The Sorrow of War." By examining the translation through the lens of this holistic approach, the study seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of the translation in capturing the essence of the original work and conveying its meaning, style, and cultural nuances to an English-speaking audience. The findings of this study would contribute to the understanding of translation quality assessment in the context of Vietnamese literature and highlight the importance of employing comprehensive evaluation

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History

- Received: Apr 16, 2024
- Accepted: Nov 5, 2024
- Published Online: Dec 31, 2024

DOI :

<https://doi.org/10.32508/stdj.v27iSI.4415>



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Cite this article : Thanh T V, Thu N T K. **Assessing The English Version Of "The Sorrow Of War" Using Waddington's Method C.** *Sci. Tech. Dev. J.* 2024 27(SI):48-55.

frameworks in the field of literary translation (Trieu, 2017)⁶.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literary Translation

Literary translation involves the translation of literary works, such as novels, short stories, plays, and poetry, from one language to another (Landers, 2001)⁷. It plays a crucial role in promoting cultural exchange and enabling readers to access and appreciate literary works from different parts of the world (Haque, 2012)¹. However, literary translation is a complex and challenging task that requires a deep understanding of both the source and target languages, as well as the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which the literary work is situated (Nord, 2014)⁸.

One of the major challenges in literary translation is effectively conveying culture-specific elements, including cultural references, allusions, and connotations, while maintaining their original meaning and significance (Nida, 2021)⁹. Translators must find ways to convey these cultural elements in a manner that is accessible and meaningful to the target audience without compromising the integrity of the original work (Cui, 2012)¹⁰. Another challenge is the preservation of the author's style, voice, and tone (Boase-Beier & Holman, 2016)¹¹. Translators must capture and recreate these stylistic elements in the target language, which requires a deep understanding of the author's intentions and the ability to find equivalent linguistic and literary devices (Venuti, 2017)¹².

Translation Quality Assessment

Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) is the process of evaluating the quality of a translated text to ensure that it accurately conveys the meaning, style, and tone of the source text (House, 2015)¹³. Various models and frameworks have been developed to assess the quality of translations, each with its own criteria and approaches (Colina, 2008; Munday, 2016)^{14,15}. These models aim to provide a systematic and objective framework for assessing translation quality, taking into account the complex interplay between linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014)¹⁶.

One notable TQA model is House's (1997)¹⁷ model, which evaluates translations based on their functional equivalence and distinguishes between overt and covert translations. Another influential model is Nord's (1991)¹⁸ functionalist approach, which considers the purpose and function of the translation in the target culture. Linguistically-oriented approaches, such as Baker's (2018)¹⁹ model, focus on

the linguistic aspects of translation, including cohesion, coherence, and pragmatic equivalence.

Waddington's TQA Model

Among various TQA models, Waddington's Method C offers distinct advantages for evaluating literary translations. Unlike error-focused approaches, it provides a holistic assessment suited to literary translation's complexities. Method C evaluates accuracy of transfer, quality of expression, and task completion (Waddington, 2001)⁵, capturing both intangible qualities and content accuracy. As Boase-Beier (2019)²⁰ notes, "Literary translation requires not only preserving the semantic meaning but also capturing the author's distinctive style, tonal nuances, and emotional resonance that characterize the original work" (p. 23). This holistic approach allows assessment of these crucial elements while maintaining focus on source text fidelity, making it particularly valuable for literary TQA.

As shown in the table above, method C's five-level scale offers a balanced framework for assessment, addressing both source text accuracy and target audience reception. As Munday (2016)¹⁴ notes, literary translation must balance "adequacy (source-text oriented) and acceptability (target-culture oriented)" (p. 157). Waddington's model achieves this by considering both transfer accuracy and expression quality. Waddington (2001)⁵ himself highlights this balance: "This method seeks to reconcile the need for analytic criteria with a holistic appreciation of the translation" (p. 315). Empirical studies have demonstrated the model's strong reliability, addressing concerns about subjectivity in TQA approaches. By employing Method C, this study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of "The Sorrow of Wars" English translation, evaluating both its fidelity to the Vietnamese original and its effectiveness for English readers.

Several studies have applied Waddington's model to assess the quality of literary translations. Shahraki and Karimnia (2011)²¹ used the model to evaluate the Persian translation of George Orwell's novel "1984," employing both error analysis (Method A) and holistic assessment (Method C). Their findings revealed that the most frequent errors were related to inappropriate renderings affecting the understanding of the source text, and the holistic assessment indicated that the translation was of average quality.

Babakordi (2012)²² applied Waddington's Method A to assess the quality of English-to-Persian translations

Table 1: Unitary scale for Method C (holistic)

Level	Accuracy of transfer ST content	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of task completion	Mark
Level 5	Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.	Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in English. There may be minor lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Successful	9, 10
Level 4	Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach 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	7, 8
Level 3	Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard	Certain parts read like a piece originally written in English, but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical grammatical or spelling errors	Adequate	6, 5
Level 2	Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies; thorough revision required to reach professional standard.	Almost the entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Inadequate	4, 3
Level 1	Totally inadequate transfer of ST content; the translation is not worth revising.	The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in English	Totally inadequate	2, 1

of literary texts produced by Iranian translation students, focusing on identifying and categorizing translation errors. The results showed that the most common errors were related to inappropriate renderings, such as faux sens and omissions.

Yousefi and Abbasian (2015)²³ conducted a study using Waddington’s model to assess the quality of English-to-Persian translations of literary, technical, legal, and religious texts. The results indicated that the students made more errors in translating literary and technical texts compared to legal and religious texts, and the overall quality of the translations was average. These studies demonstrate the applicability of Waddington’s TQA model to literary translations and its potential to provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of translations. However, it is important to note that the majority of these studies focused on English-to-Persian translations, and there is a need for further research applying Waddington’s model to different language pairs and literary genres.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a content analysis approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, to

assess the translation quality of the novel “The Sorrow of War” using Waddington’s Method C (Bennett, 2015)²⁴. The Vietnamese version (ST) from Tre Publishing House (Ninh, 2012)²⁵ and the English version (TT) from Anchor (Ninh, 2018)²⁶ were used in this study. The researcher carefully read the TT and compared it with the ST for further analysis.

Data Collection Procedures

The Vietnamese and English versions of the book were converted from paper to digital format (Word and Excel files) to facilitate analysis. Both the ST and TT were transcribed into an Excel file for comparison and analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis process involved detailed examination and expert review. Using Waddington’s Method C, the researcher assessed the translation based on accuracy of transfer from the ST to the TT, quality of expression in the target language, and degree of task completion. A scale with multiple levels was used to provide a nuanced evaluation of the translation’s quality. An expert in English language and translation reviewed the data at multiple stages to enhance reliability and accuracy.

Face validity was ensured through external audits, while content validity was established by examining the conceptual framework of Waddington's model and adapting it to the research objectives and context. Construct validity was ensured by selecting Waddington's TQA model based on its strong theoretical foundation and widespread recognition in translation studies.

To establish reliability, two specific processes were implemented. Firstly, all data was meticulously recorded in a table, providing an overview of the data collection process and allowing for ongoing assessment of results. This tabular format enabled quick interpretation of results for each individual element and facilitated tracking of the research progress. Secondly, inter-rater reliability was employed to validate the data analysis. An expert in the field of English language studies was invited to re-analyze 20 randomly chosen pieces of data. The approved convergent result threshold was set at 95%, ensuring a high level of agreement between raters. These measures, combined with the expert review at multiple stages, significantly enhanced the reliability and accuracy of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The holistic assessment of the English translation of "The Sorrow of War" using Waddington's Method C revealed varying levels of translation quality across the eight chapters. The assessment considered accuracy of transfer, quality of expression, and degree of task completion. Table 4.1 presents the results of the holistic assessment for each chapter.

The translation of Chapter 1 was assessed at Level 3 for accuracy of transfer, indicating a transfer of general ideas but with inaccuracies and lapses requiring considerable revision. The quality of expression was rated as 9, with the majority of the translation reading like a piece originally written in English, despite instances of lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors. The degree of task completion was considered adequate, resulting in a mark of 6.

Illustration from Chapter 1:

ST: Ấy là Can, đội trưởng A2, một anh chàng bé nhỏ, còm nhom, quê ở "câu tôm". Can "**câu tôm**".

TT: It was Can, chief of Squad 2. A small thin boy, nicknamed "**Rattling**" Can.

In this example, the ST uses the Vietnamese phrase "câu tôm," which carries a unique cultural reference, while the TT translates it as "Rattling" Can, losing the cultural nuance and significance.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were assessed at Level 2 for accuracy of transfer, indicating serious inaccuracies

that undermined the transfer and required thorough revision. The quality of expression for these chapters was rated as 9, suggesting that most of the text read like a translation with continual errors. The degree of task completion was deemed inadequate, resulting in a mark of 3 for each of these chapters.

Illustration from Chapter 2:

ST: Ngay cả giọng người, mẹ kiếp, xin nói là còn chán mới hông có lại để giao tiếp với đời. Anh **triết lý** kinh thật. Và đến là bi.

TT: You won't even speak with your normal voice, in the normal way again. "You're so damn **gloomy**. What a doom-laden attitude!"

In this example, the ST uses the phrase "triết lý" to describe the person's behavior as philosophical or thoughtful, while the TT translates it as "gloomy," altering the intended meaning and misrepresenting the character's attitude.

Illustration from Chapter 3:

ST: Phòng im phắc, lặng cảm song không phải là Kiên đã đi ngủ. Cây đèn hoa kỳ đã cạn dầu, bắc nhỏ cao cháy đỏ như mẩu thép nung. Kiên không ở bên bàn mà quỳ cạnh cái lò sưởi ở trong góc.

TT: Kien was kneeling by his stove, repeatedly shoving torn paper into it and lighting it. She silently closed the door behind her and softly walked over to kneel beside him. Recalling the story of the frenzied destruction of his father's paintings, she placed her hand over his to stop him from burning more pages.

The TT captures the general essence of the ST but omits several details and nuances. In the ST, Kien is described as kneeling next to the stove, unable to sleep, with the fire fluctuating. The TT simplifies this by stating that she kneeled beside him, without mentioning his inability to sleep or the fire's instability. The ST includes a reference to the story of Kien's father's destroyed paintings, triggering the narrator's memory. The TT skips this part and jumps straight to the narrator recalling the story and placing her hand over Kien's. The ST describes Kien's startled expression and emotional reaction when the fire goes out, while the TT only mentions that he looked startled to see her. Consequently, the TT captures the basic actions but loses some of the atmospheric and emotional nuances present in the ST.

Illustration from Chapter 4:

ST: **Em** mệt quá - Phương nói thì thầm, kê tựa mình.

Lần đầu tiên cô xưng em với Kiên.

TT: "I'm exhausted," she said invitingly. "I just want to lie here forever."

The TT does not directly translate or convey the significance of Phương using the pronoun "em" to address Kien for the first time, which conveys intimacy

Table 2: Results of the holistic assessment for each chapter

Chapter	Accuracy of Transfer ST Content	Quality of Expression in TL	Degree of Task Completion	Mark
1	Level 3	9	Adequate	6
2	Level 1	9	Totally inadequate	1
3	Level 2	9	Inadequate	3
4	Level 2	9	Inadequate	3
5	Level 2	9	Inadequate	3
6	Level 2	9	Inadequate	3
7	Level 2	9	Inadequate	3
8	Level 5	9	Successful	9

and endearment in Vietnamese. As a result, the TT loses the specific cultural and emotional nuances associated with the use of "em", though the following sentence seems to highlight the use of the pronoun "em" as a change in Phuong's attitude towards Kiên-an endearment that grows stronger.

Illustration from Chapter 5:

ST: Nhiều buổi tối, **đứng bên cửa sổ nghe tiếng ồn ào của cuộc vui bên buồng nàng**, lòng dạ bị trí tưởng tượng ghen tuông hành hạ, Kiên tự hỏi có nên lần sang đấm gục, đấm bất kỳ ai trong đám khách khứa rồi thì đập tan cái đàn của nàng ra.

TT: He had suffered through the nights when she had openly tormented him or brought in other lovers. Storming into her room could never have helped things. Drinking until dead drunk to remove traces of her was equally futile. It was over.

The TT provides a condensed version of the ST, omitting several details and nuances, such as Kien standing by the window and hearing the noise of the party in her room, which triggers his imagination and jealousy. This omission results in a loss of specific details and emotions associated with Kien's torment and longing for Phuong.

Illustration from Chapter 6:

ST: Trườn theo các lùm cây, Kiên men tới cửa rừng và len lén anh nhồm lên, quỳ một chân, nhìn ra trắng. Quả lựu đạn đã rút chốt như chỉ chực rớt ngay xuống chân Kiên. **Tay anh lạnh ngắt, các ngón run và toàn thân anh trông trắng, đầu óc chao đưa hầu như không còn tự chủ được nữa.**

TT: Now left behind and relatively safe, Kien crawled to a safer position and tried to see what had happened to Hoa. As the almost silent but barbarous multiple rape of young Hoa continued in the small jungle clearing in the dying minutes of that harrowing day, Kien crept off away from them, towards his wounded men.

The TT briefly mentions that Kien crawled to a safer position and tried to see what happened to Hoa, omitting the vivid description of Kien's physical and mental state, his trembling hands, the horror around him, and his internal struggle, as depicted in the ST.

Illustration from Chapter 7:

ST: Đã bảo cậu sợ thì cậu **tếch đi mà lị**.

TT: "If you're scared, **get out**."

The ST uses the colloquial expressions "tếch" and "mà lị" to convey a sense of urgency and emphasis. However, the TT simplifies the dialogue to "If you're scared, get out," losing the specific linguistic variations and the nuanced tone of the original.

Chapter 8 achieved Level 5 for accuracy of transfer, indicating a complete transfer with only minor revisions required. The quality of expression was rated as 9, suggesting that the translation read as a piece originally written in English. The degree of task completion was marked as successful, resulting in a mark of 9.

Illustration from Chapter 8:

ST: Ngày mà tất cả đều còn rất **son trẻ**, trong trắng và chân thành.

TT: Those were the days when all of us were **young**, very pure, and very sincere.

In this example, the ST uses the phrase "son trẻ" which carries nuanced connotations of purity, freshness, and sincerity, while the TT translates it simply as "young," capturing the general idea of youthfulness but lacking the depth and richness conveyed by the original phrase.

These findings highlight the importance of ensuring accuracy in the transfer of source text content, maintaining a high quality of expression in the target language, and successfully completing the translation task to provide readers with a faithful and engaging rendition of the original work.

Discussion

This study adopted a chapter-based approach in applying Waddington's model to "The Sorrow of War," driven by both practical considerations and the novel's unique structure. This method offers several advantages for assessing complex literary works. Baker (2018)¹⁹ notes that "Translators may face different challenges in different parts of a text, depending on the content, style, and cultural references present" (p. 234), making chapter-level analysis particularly insightful.

The approach aligns well with the novel's non-linear narrative. Tran (2019)³ observes that "The Sorrow of War" "jumps between different time periods and emotional states, creating a fragmented narrative that mirrors the protagonist's fractured psyche" (p. 45). Chapter-by-chapter assessment allows for evaluation of how effectively the translation captures these shifts in perspective and intensity. Moreover, this method can reveal patterns in translation quality that might be obscured in a generalized assessment. Munday (2016)¹⁴ argues that "Detailed analysis of smaller units can provide insights into the translator's decision-making process and strategies" (p. 142). It also facilitates targeted comparison between source and target texts. As Malmkjær (2018)²⁷ emphasizes, "comparing equivalent units of text [ensures] a fair and accurate assessment of translation quality" (p. 56). Chapters provide natural, coherent units for this comparison in "The Sorrow of War," allowing for precise identification of the translation's strengths and weaknesses.

The holistic assessment using Waddington's Method C revealed inconsistent translation quality across the eight chapters of "The Sorrow of War." Although the English rendering achieved natural fluency that resembled original English prose, substantial issues emerged in the accurate transfer of cultural nuances and emotional depth, particularly evident in Chapters 2 through 7.

The inaccuracies in the transfer of source text content can substantially impact the reader's understanding and interpretation of the novel. For instance, the translation of "câu tồm" as "Rattling" Can in Chapter 1 fails to capture the cultural significance and nuance associated with the original phrase, potentially diminishing the authenticity and depth of the translated work (Boase-Beier & Holman, 2016)¹¹. Similarly, the omission of significant details and emotions, as seen in the example from Chapter 3, can result in a loss of emotional depth and nuance, affecting the reader's understanding of the characters' internal struggles, motivations, and relationships (Xioli, 2019)²⁸. Besides, the quality of expression in

the target language, while generally high, was marred by lexical, grammatical, and spelling errors throughout the translation. These errors can disrupt the reading experience and detract from the overall quality of the translation. The degree of task completion varied significantly across chapters, with Chapter 8 standing out as a successful translation, while the other chapters were deemed either adequate or inadequate. This inconsistency suggests that the translation may not have fully captured the nuances and subtleties of the source text throughout the novel.

The findings above align with previous research that has applied Waddington's model to assess the quality of literary translations (Shahraki & Karimnia, 2011; Babakordi, 2012; Yousefi & Abbasian, 2015)²¹⁻²³. These studies have highlighted the importance of considering multiple aspects of translation quality, such as accuracy, expression, and task completion, to gain a comprehensive understanding of a translation's strengths and weaknesses. The results underscore the significance of employing a holistic approach, like Waddington's Method C, in evaluating literary translations. By considering the translation as a whole and assessing it across various dimensions, this method provides a more nuanced and context-sensitive evaluation compared to error-based approaches (Karimi et al., 2016)²⁹.

While Waddington's Method C offers a comprehensive approach to translation quality assessment, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, particularly the potential for subjectivity (Babakordi, 2012; Yousefi & Abbasian, 2015)^{22,23}. However, these challenges are not unique to Waddington's model but are inherent in most TQA frameworks. As Williams (2009) argues, "The quest for absolute objectivity in translation assessment remains elusive, yet Waddington's method provides a structured approach that mitigates subjective bias" (p. 18). Indeed, for literary works that demand multi-dimensional evaluation, the holistic nature of Method C proves particularly valuable (Shahraki & Karimnia, 2011)²¹.

CONCLUSION

This study's application of Waddington's Translation Quality Assessment model, specifically Method C, to evaluate the English translation of Bao Ninh's "The Sorrow of War" has yielded valuable insights into the complexities of literary translation. The analysis revealed varying levels of translation quality across the eight chapters, with significant issues in content transfer accuracy, particularly in Chapters 2 to 7. While the translation generally read fluently in English, it struggled to preserve crucial cultural nuances and emotional depth inherent in Vietnamese literature.

The findings underscore the need for a TQA approach more attuned to the nuances of literary translation. As House (2015)¹³ suggests, "An effective literary TQA model must consider not only the accuracy of translation but also its success in conveying the literary qualities of the source text" (p. 103). A multidisciplinary approach incorporating insights from literary studies could enhance the TQA process, involving analysis of narrative structures, evaluation of literary devices transfer, assessment of the author's voice preservation, and consideration of the translation's impact on the target culture's literary landscape.

Despite the need for a more nuanced approach, Waddington's model remains a valuable and widely recognized tool in translation quality assessment. Its effectiveness has been demonstrated in various studies, with Conde (2011)³⁰ concluding that it "provides a reliable and comprehensive framework for evaluating translation quality across different text types" (p. 108). The model's adaptability, as noted by Melis and Albir (2001), makes it particularly suitable for assessing translations between linguistically and culturally distant languages.

The model's holistic approach also aligns with contemporary views on translation quality. Mariana (2014)³¹ argues that Waddington's method C provides a balanced assessment by considering both micro-level accuracy and macro-level readability, crucial for evaluating complex literary works. Its widespread adoption in academic and professional settings, as observed by Williams (2009)³², further underscores its value and reliability.

Moving forward, researchers and practitioners in Vietnam can enhance Waddington's framework by incorporating Vietnamese-specific cultural markers, linguistic patterns, and literary conventions to develop a more culturally attuned assessment tool that better captures the nuances of Vietnamese-English literary translation. By adapting the model to the Vietnamese context, a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to assessing Vietnamese-English literary translations can be developed. This study not only contributes to the field of translation quality assessment but also opens avenues for further research into the application of TQA models across different literary genres, languages, and cultural contexts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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