

TRANSLATION ASSESSORS IN AND OUT OF THEIR ELEMENT LOS EVALUADORES DE TRADUCCIONES DENTRO Y FUERA DEL AGUA

OS AVALIADORES DE TRADUÇÃO DENTRO E FORA DO SEU ELEMENTO

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Translation assessment is an activity present in many scenarios and the diverse individuals who must deal with it partly explains the variability of such activity. Previous Translation Studies have already profiled and compared both the behaviour and the results of assessments carried out by a variety of evaluators. This paper examines the main contributions concerning this issue, and adds to the field by distinguishing between the contexts in which evaluators carry out their usual work and other less paradigmatic situations. The result is a compendium of the characteristics defining the prototypical evaluator profiles as well as presenting a warning for researchers, professionals, students and teachers on the special conditions that, depending on the circumstances, affect their evaluation and make it look as a different activity. The discussion includes complex formulas characterized by the collaboration of different groups of evaluators, as well as of those whose profile is not defined always by a single role. Therefore, the present paper may serve as an inspiration for new research investigating the profiles of evaluators to open the focus and take into account the circumstances that may affect their alleged habitual activity.

Keywords: Assessment. Translation Evaluation. Professional Profiles.

La evaluación de traducciones es una actividad presente en multitud de escenarios, cuya variabilidad la explica en parte la diversidad de sujetos que se enfrentan a ella. Los Estudios de Traducción se han ocupado de perfilar y comparar el comportamiento y el resultado de la evaluación llevada a cabo por distintos tipos de evaluadores. Este trabajo revisa dichas aportaciones pero yendo un paso más allá, al distinguir entre los escenarios en los que los evaluadores ejercen su labor habitual y otras situaciones menos paradigmáticas. El resultado es, por una parte, un compendio de las características que definen el perfil evaluador prototípico; por otra, una llamada de atención para investigadores, profesionales, estudiantes y docentes sobre las condiciones especiales que hacen de su evaluación algo diferente en según qué contextos. Se tratan por ejemplo fórmulas complejas caracterizadas por la colaboración de diversos tipos de evaluadores, así como la difícil categorización de los evaluadores, cuyo perfil a menudo no está definido por un solo rol. En síntesis, el trabajo puede servir de inspiración para que nuevas investigaciones que indaguen en los perfiles de evaluadores abran el foco y tengan en cuenta las circunstancias que pueden afectar a su supuesta actividad habitual.

Palabras clave: Evaluación. Evaluación de la traducción. Perfiles profesionales.

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A avaliação de traduções é uma atividade que se encontra presente numa infinidade de cenários, cuja variabilidade é explicada, em parte, pela diversidade de sujeitos que a enfrentam e executam. Tem sido preocupação dos Estudos de Tradução traçar perfis e comparar o comportamento e os resultados da avaliação realizada por diferentes tipos de avaliadores. Este artigo analisa esses contributos, embora pretenda dar um passo em frente, ao distinguir entre os cenários em que os avaliadores realizam o seu trabalho habitual e outras situações menos paradigmáticas. O resultado é, por um lado, a apresentação de um compêndio das características que definem o perfil prototípico do avaliador; e, por outro lado, um alerta para investigadores, profissionais, estudantes e professores sobre as condições especiais que tornam a sua avaliação algo diferente consoante o contexto. Por exemplo, são discutidas fórmulas complexas caracterizadas pela colaboração de vários tipos de avaliadores, bem como a difícil categorização dos avaliadores, cujo perfil, muitas vezes, não é definido por uma única função. Em síntese, o trabalho pode servir de inspiração para novas pesquisas que investiguem os perfis dos avaliadores de forma a permitir essa abertura de foco e tomando em consideração as circunstâncias que podem afetar a sua suposta atividade habitual.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação. Avaliação da tradução. Perfis profissionais.

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1. Introduction

The evaluation of products and services is a continual process, from the latest Netflix series to school essays, from cooking recipes to mobile apps. Whilst expert assessments are often in demand, the opinion of members of the public is also welcomed.

The opinion of people is also gathered within research contexts. On the assumption that their role determines their overall behaviour, the information obtained is usually classified based on an already-assigned category. Nevertheless, the truth is that no one behaves according to his or her role in every possible situation. A chef does not assess the same recipe in a three-star Michelin restaurant and in the first year of a cooking school, nor does the telecommunications engineer behave in the same manner in their usual work routine as at a technology fair.

Translation is no exception to this variation. It is often argued that the lack of unanimous quality criteria has a big impact on the validity of the evaluation. However, there are diverse criteria, not only because translation evaluation may be carried out by different evaluators, but also because these evaluators sometimes operate in contexts different than usual, i.e. out of their element.

This paper addresses the evaluation of translations undertaken by people of several profiles. The aim is to stimulate a reflection on the characteristics that affect the way of evaluating of these profiles, also taking into account whether, within each group, the task is carried out from a unique point of view, or if, conversely, the same subjects vary their evaluation depending on differing given contexts.

Section 2 is a review of the prototypical situation where the four principal translation evaluators assess: teachers, students, professional translators and recipients. In

section 3, the same profiles of evaluators are discussed from a broader perspective, that is, taking into account those situations that differ to the standard ones.

2. Standard situation

Assessment is a subjective task mostly undertaken by humans, but as may happens with doctors (De Sutter et al., 2018), sometimes decisions are made with the aid of computer tools. However, this work omits the manual evaluation of machine translation tools aimed at assessing the mere functioning of these, rather than the competence or behaviour of the people using them.

2.1. Teachers

Scenario one: teachers who evaluate their students. From an academic point of view, an expert writer evaluates the work of another less expert writer (Munday, 2001).

We know manifold aspects about how teachers evaluate.

2.1.1. Grading

Teachers are expected to judge the relative success of their students in relation to the rest of their peers, or else based on fixed criteria. Nonetheless, they must also be able to justify their qualifications.

The result of this type of summative evaluation is not exempt from review, so teachers protect themselves against criticism, normally aspiring to objectivity (Huertas Barros & Vine 2016). In the search for this objectivity, they consider it important to use tasks (Galán-Mañas & Hurtado Albir, 2015) and specific tools, such as sheets (see, for example, Bazzocchi, 2019), with which to offer explanations, point out errors and subtract points from the grade (Gardy, 2016).

The same claim of objectivity gives rise to research comparing the effectiveness of alternative evaluation methods (usually holistic and analytical ones), such as those of Waddington (2001) or Eyckmans et al. (2009).

2.1.2. Guiding

Teachers are concerned with helping students improve their learning in both the short and medium term. With this objective, they make decisions of various kinds, including:

- They introduce systems to establish the knowledge level of the learners at the beginning of the training (diagnostic evaluation). The work of Galán-Mañas (2016) serves as an example.
- They replicate the criteria employed in the industry (Huertas Barros & Vine, 2016).
- They assume the role of the potential recipients of the translation and as such react to the work (Anderman & Rogers, 1997). Some authors (such as Muzii, 2006) warn that evaluators are prone over zealousness when judging the translations of their students, forgetting the lower acceptance quality limit that is common in the professional sphere.

- Ideally, they offer personalized explanations, which they later complement and enrich during in-class discussions (Bazzocchi, 2019). Therefore, positive communication between teacher and learner enhances learning (Klimkowski, 2019).
- They should take into account learning potential (Akrami, Ghonsooly, Yazdani & Alami, 2018), while in professional environments the objective is simply to establish that the translation is fit for its purpose (Anderman & Rogers, 1997).

The above-mentioned decisions require that there is little physical and personal distance between students and teachers: only then can the latter check whether their methodology is functioning correctly.

2.1.3. Adaptation

The third remarkable feature of the teachers that evaluate is that they are free to adjust their methodology when they deem it necessary (Hegrenæs & Simonnæs, 2020).

Most teachers choose a method not according to scientific reasons, but to personal preferences (Wang, 2020) and without consensus with other teachers (Gardy, 2016), which implies that there are “almost as many translation criteria as translation teachers” (Li, 2006, p. 84). This singularity may also be explained by the fact that many teachers do not have specific training in evaluation.

At times, adapting the evaluation methodology is a consequence of efficiency-related adjustments. It should be noted that this environment is one of the few contexts where serial evaluation occurs, *i.e.* evaluating several translations of the same original. Time spent correcting such translations may often be a recurring cause for complaint (Szarkowska, 2020).

In contrast, other adaptations are responses to the pressure that some teachers feel in comparison with other more or less demanding colleagues, with the assessment surveys that their students respond in order to evaluate teachers’ performance, etc. It is not surprising, then, that it is the teachers themselves who are interested in research aimed at the elaboration or analysis of new tools and procedures (Hurtado Albir & Olalla-Soler 2016, Hurtado Albir & Pavani, 2018 or Zappatore, 2020) such as scales, rubrics (Hegrenæs & Simonnæs 2020), translation commentaries (Shih, 2018) or portfolios (Acuyo, 2009).

2.2. Students

Students also evaluate. Their behaviour is usually characterized by the following features.

2.2.1. Control

Whether when evaluating themselves, or other students or peers, assessment conducted by students usually serves to regulate a learning process (Pietrzak, 2019).

Some authors have addressed the didactic advantages of several forms of peer evaluation. These advantages include self-efficacy (Konttinen, 2021), lifelong learning

(Way, 2008), critical thinking (Hegrenæs & Simonnæs, 2020; Haiyan, 2006), process knowledge (Pietrzak, 2019) and even the increasing of product quality (Pietrzak, 2018).

Another variant of self-evaluation is that which lays on the pact between teachers and students. Huertas-Barros and Vine (2019b) suggest that the participation of students in the construction of the evaluation criteria increases their awareness of what is expected of them, as well as encouraging them to be more enthusiastic and motivated.

2.2.2. Inexperience

The collaboration mentioned in the previous paragraph arises perhaps because students – although used to being subject to evaluations – are not accustomed to carrying out their own evaluations, which is probably why they find it difficult to see themselves on the other side, and hybrid formulas may arise based on dialogue with their teachers.

It may also be the teachers who provide the tools for self-assessment, among others: collaborative discussion groups, portfolios (Galán-Mañas, 2016), rubrics (Way, 2008; Hegrenæs & Simonnæs, 2020; De Higes Andino & Cerezo Merchán, 2018) or surveys (Zappatore, 2020).

In fact, students' lack of experience may cause them to show a genuine point of view. For example, Huertas-Barros and Vine (2016; 2019a) revise the different attitudes among teachers and translation students regarding evaluation: whilst teachers attend to linguistic and strategic skills, students are more interested in intercultural skills.

2.2.3. Group

Students prefer taking criticism from peers (Kelly, 2005) rather than from their teachers. It is likely that, finding themselves in the same situation, they empathize. Some authors agree that constructive peer evaluation is useful for students:

Perhaps a more practical alternative approach is to encourage students to rely on feedback from their peers. Their peers are by definition in the same boat and are likely to share similar anxieties. Mutual support may overcome problems and frustrations. Peers can share strategies for tackling the common difficulties they face when learning interpreting skills. In short, to maximise the learning experience and result of conference interpreting, I believe in addition to trainers' guidance, it is important to address the significance of trainee collaboration. (Peng, 2006, p. 6)

However, although students consider that evaluation should be objective (Huertas-Barros & Vine, 2019a), when they come to assess their classmates' work, they may be too solidary. Perhaps for this reason, some authors (such as Haiyan, 2006) propose that peer evaluation be carried out without assigning numerical grades, pointing only to areas that have not been clear or about which doubts may arise.

2.3. Translators

Professional translators usually evaluate themselves or colleagues outside the project on which they may be working. Their prototypical profile may be summarized as follows.

2.3.1. Expertise

Consequently, they have developed an informed opinion on quality, i.e. about what is correct or incorrect in their performance or competence. They usually acquire this experience through their work, but also thanks to training completed and lifelong learning (continuous improvement of working languages, unfinished tertiary studies, travel, etc.). An example of this identification of professionals with experts is the heuristic type of evaluation commented on by Suokas (2020).

However, it is not clear that experience in the sector leads to a more demanding evaluation of their colleagues' work – even though this effect was suggested by Gile (2001) among interpreters – since it is also possible that the fact of being colleagues arouses a feeling of empathy.

2.3.2. Cooperation

Among translators involved in evaluation procedures, there is usually no clear hierarchy, but rather cooperation. Sirén and Hakkrarainen (2002) highlight the labour ties and alliances established among professionals, a collaboration from which everyone draws a benefit. Furthermore, Hönig (1997) states that professional translators need evaluation to stand out above translators who do their job for little money, since quality comes to be their only way to excel and perhaps, survive in the market.

On the periphery of this market are the models that Drugan (2013, pp. 159–182) calls *bottom-up* i.e. open or amateur translations. In such experiences, where the workflow is chaotic, support systems include positive responses that strengthen the motivation of volunteers.

2.4. Recipients

The recipients or addressees evaluate translations. Often (but not always) they are the same people as the final customers themselves.

2.4.1. Usefulness

For Pinto (2001), the readers – or recipients – of the target text are the authentic evaluators of the translation. They are essential in knowing a translator's reliability and the quality of their products (Hönig, 1997). As the decisions of the company and the translators depend largely on the clients' degree of satisfaction with the translated text, more so than in other fields, in the fields of communication and language laymen may feel entitled to tell professionals how to carry out their work.

In the market, translation errors have consequences mostly related to clients. Furthermore, in some of the top-down models that Drugan (2013) describes, customers are essential in setting control methods. Nevertheless, the role of clients stands out above all in the bottom-up models, since it is they who eventually determine what must or must not be translated, and the degree of acceptance. According to Drugan, it appears that these models are less demanding, for they do not guarantee a revision or quality control phase.

The individuals who use and contribute to bottom-up approaches involve challenges for quality and top-down models too. Bottom-up approaches embrace locales and providers with little experience of professional translation. Outsourcing of some TQA aspects to low-cost countries (e.g. post-production processes) means that important stages may be divorced from linguistic expertise, with resulting risks to quality (as already observed in the subtitling industry, where separation of linguistic and technical QA is common). (Drugan, 2013, pp. 177–178).

In point of fact, in translations carried out by fans, user evaluation consists of rating and voting systems (such as “like”, “dislike”) that are probably too basic.

2.4.2. Limitations

Recipients do not usually have sufficient knowledge of the source language to use the product in its original form. Because they do not understand the text or are unfamiliar with the corresponding terminology, they tend to focus on subjective or general issues, such as clarity, style or disposition (Gile, 2001). They even consider incomprehensible texts to be adequate (Hönig, 1997), leading some authors to question the validity of their value judgments.

This is true in other modalities as well. For example, in fansubbing (Orrego-Carmona, 2019), a field where the audience is both translator and recipient, access and speed seem to count more than other criteria common in industry and academia, such as good synchronization or characters per line.

Finally, recipients do not need to have specific knowledge about the translation process either, at least not until they become regular customers.

2.4.3. Involvement

With other types of evaluators, assessment is a form of control that is not only present at the end, but also applied during the process, when weighing the convenience of the solutions provided before completing the first draft. In contrast, recipients are often unconnected to the translation process. As experience does not contaminate their perception, they seem ideal for measuring issues such as usability.

This circumstance may be the reason why so many investigations aimed at better knowing the profile of the potential reader have been performed recently. Mention may be made, among other research, of the so-called user-centered translation (UCT) method, described in Suojanen et al. (2015); the reception of the subtitling for the deaf and the audio description of Rica Peromingo (2019); the post-edited texts carried out with clients

of a telecommunications company in Vam Egdome and Pluymaekers (2019) or the usability of medical texts on disability in the upper extremities discussed by Orfale et al. (2005).

3. Expanding the focus

The previous section shows the most important features of the people who evaluate when they perform it in their usual environment. However, as will be seen below, students, teachers, translators and recipients sometimes act uncharacteristically, under non-standard circumstances.

3.1. Teachers

To begin with, when thinking of teachers evaluating the work of students, we usually think of *their* teachers. Nonetheless, the teacher in charge of the training is not necessarily the one to evaluate it.

Does anything change when there is no close relationship with the student? A recent example is the Hungarian experience regarding distance assessment of final examinations in Benedek et al. (2021). As regards this particular profile, two types of evaluators may be distinguished: those who are translation teachers and those who are not.

3.1.1. Translation teachers

Many investigations include translation teachers used to evaluate translations, occasionally in works leading to doctoral theses. This is the case of the work of Abihssira García, in which teachers and professional translators evaluated the quality of translations, focusing on creativity and personality traits. Conde Ruano's thesis (2009) helped to profile this type of evaluator, who showed an analytical, systematic, didactic and confident behaviour.

What is often checked is the usefulness of new evaluation tools (as in Eyckmans & Anckaert, 2018), for which teachers are not used. Translation teachers are then asked to evaluate in a different way than normal; additionally, the tool employed frequently serves to more easily assess the competence of students they do not know personally (as they are not their students, they do not have other data on which to base their quality judgments). In the case described by Hegrenæs and Simonnæs (2020), such a tool is the rubric.

Therefore, the main reason why teachers take part in these investigations is their availability as expert translators: a requisite for them being to have some years of experience. For instance, in Wang's (2020) research on analytical and holistic methods for evaluating literary translation, a minimum of five years of teaching experience was required.

3.1.2. Teachers in other disciplines

Of course, it is more difficult when teachers in charge of evaluating translations are not even translation teachers, since they lack experience both in evaluating translations and in translation itself.

Again, the fact that they are open and receptive seems to be the key to the fact that they are contacted. However, in that case they probably do not behave as teachers, but rather as some kind of instructed recipients.

3.2. Students

The case of students is similar to that described for teachers. A distinction is occasionally made between translation students and students from other disciplines.

3.2.1. Translation students

In research aimed at broadening the knowledge about translation evaluation, students are frequent informants. When they do participate, it is usually not because their opinion on the training is thought to be interesting, but rather because they are easily accessible informants for teachers and researchers.

Translation students were one of the four groups that completed the assessment task included in Conde Ruano's doctoral thesis (2009). Their behaviour stood out for the exhaustiveness with which they dealt with the proposed exercise, as well as for the level of coincidence among the evaluations of the students that made up the group.

Examples that are more recent are the doctoral students participating in the works by Jia et al. (2019) and Angelone (2020). The complex nature of these contexts is even more evident in the latter work (with screen recording of the translation process), for the informants were students but had some teaching experience as well.

Nevertheless, research oriented to the study of expertise usually takes students into account not because of their standard role (learners) but as types of novice or newly initiated translators; the opposite happens with teachers or professional translators, who are often taken as examples of a higher stage in the scale of expertise.

3.2.2. Students in other disciplines

For the same reason that translations students take part in research unconnected with their learning process, students from other studies are also selected to get a better understanding of the translation process and its results.

One possibility is that they act as simulated clients of the professionals. In Conde Ruano (2009), science and political science students acted as potential addressees of the translations that they were asked to evaluate. Their inexperience was believed to have had an impact on their behaviour (lack of demand, superficiality and insecurity).

As in many other cases, it must be noted that these informants took part in the experiment just because it was uncomplicated to contact them. Since they were also students, however, the question is, did this complex profile affect the results?

3.3. Translators

Professional translators collaborate regularly in research in order to incorporate market views into academic evaluation.

Two works where this may be evident are the aforementioned Jia et al. (2019) and Huertas-Barros and Vine (2019b). In the former, there were only translators with at least ten years of experience. In the latter, industry representatives contributed their perspective to the evaluation criteria designed by students and teachers.

We first liaised with a leading global provider of Marketing and Communications Services in London, who invited us to visit their premises and provided us with some insights into their transcreation process. We exchanged ideas and discussed an outline of the transcreation project we had envisaged with the Project Manager and Creative Director, and refined the various transcreation stages in the light of their feedback. Involving the professional community in the design of the transcreation project ensured the task was realistic and a valid object of assessment. (Huertas-Barros & Vine 2019b, p. 277)

Meanwhile, Conde Ruano (2009) discovered that the evaluation carried out by professional translators was more coincident than the one made by the other three groups; furthermore, professional translators appeared to be concerned about leaving texts ready for use, especially regarding formal issues.

Overall, although translators' opinions are valuable, they are probably in a treacherous terrain. When Kim (2020) describes the process of selecting translators and interpreters in two South Korean public institutions, she criticizes that the second stage of assessment (involving teachers and professional translators) seemed to be more like an elimination stage (of ineligible candidates), specifically because the evaluators neither had quality criteria set in advance nor had received specific training.

However, the opposite could be true as well: when these evaluators are provided with many instructions and instruments, they may not evaluate the performance in a 'natural' way. Accordingly, Conde Ruano (2009) drew attention to the fact that translators often turned to the researcher and reacted in an extreme and overconscientious manner, perhaps seeking to legitimize their knowledge and stand out from their colleagues. Another possible explanation for this behaviour is that their vocation or mixed profiles affect their assessment. In fact, it should be borne in mind that many professional translators are also language teachers or have a teaching vocation.

3.4. Recipients

Among the recipients of translations are not only clients and potential addressees. In professional environments, intermediaries are common, for example, in business terminology, it is possible to distinguish between external and internal clients. Of these two types of clients, external ones are perhaps best suited to the standard translation scheme. However, it is also necessary to consider those who value the translator's work before it reaches the actual clients.

Depending on the task and the circumstances of each task, several types of evaluators may be seen within a translation company or agency.

To begin with, there are those in charge of hiring in-house or freelance translators, who prepare special access tests (often real translations) and assess the work of the candidates. Internal clients aim to improve the translation service; they are a guarantee for external clients (Shuttleworth, 1997) and the company's weapon to stand out from other companies (Hönig 1997). The evaluation of this type of recipients normally covers the entire process; it focuses on issues addressed in quality standards, such as hiring or assignment of tasks depending on the specialisation or modality. This function is often the responsibility of coordinators and translators on staff, who analyse in detail the texts issued by freelancers.

Furthermore, there is the assessment or control of the work of freelance or training translators, such as the experiences described by Gummerus and Paro (2001) and Brunette (2000). These studies show professional situations characterized by this type of internal evaluations that, for economic reasons, do not always include feedback for translators.

Thanks to the spread of initiatives aiming at examining workplaces, there are more and more studies on collaborative quality assurance processes within companies. An example is the situation described by Kamal (2005), who considers the translation agency as a complex type of quality assurance. More complete is Drugan's (2013) review of the existing top-down models in companies, based on rigid quality assurance systems set forth by the supervisors. Some models are organised according to the experience of the translators; others, to the content of the translations or their purpose.

To finish this section, a mention should be made to the study of Sirovec (2020), who does not analyse a private company, but an official institution: the General Directorate of Translation of the European Union. This researcher is concerned about improving the systems necessary to control the quality of outsourced translations, which are becoming increasingly common in the market.

4. Conclusions

The preceding sections present a review of the major issues affecting the principal evaluators of translations. A distinction has been made between the situations that are taken as standard and those situations and contexts, which even if existing, are often overlooked.

In summary, firstly, even though mostly diverse people carry out translations and evaluations tasks, there are other formulas, such as peer evaluation or self-assessment, which are also common practice. Such experiences include mixed systems, where the evaluators and those evaluated collaborate in the construction of criteria.

Secondly, translators almost never play a unique role. Students may have teaching experience; teachers may work both in the classroom and in the market; translators, vice versa, and clients may be translators at the same time, as in amateur translations.

Thirdly, today more than ever the work is shared out, even assessment, which not only relies on technological tools, but can also depend on the teamwork of several people.

The increasing complexity underlying this cooperation demands new research to discover its organization, features and, perhaps, advantages.

New research should be conducted on the attitudes and performances of evaluators when they step outside their comfort zone, to check whether they adapt to the circumstances or instead always behave in a uniform way. It is evident that teachers, students, translators and recipients evaluate in research contexts that do not exactly replicate their usual environment.

The present work is thus a reminder for researchers working in this area. At times, generalizations are made or conclusions are drawn based on the primary role of the evaluators, disregarding any peculiarities or non-standard profiles. In the light of the data, these roles should be rethought or, at least, other issues affecting the work of evaluators should also be taken into consideration when launching an investigation.

The reflections provided have an extra impact on teaching since, as has been seen, teachers usually take into account the quality assessment standards that are common in the industry. The fact that these issues are increasingly complex, involving more people and stages, should distance the teachers from unsophisticated practices that may rely on mere stereotypes or outdated models.

This paper may shed some light on direct research related to the evaluation of translations; nevertheless, it is not an empirical proposal per se. Moreover, the revision could have included other profiles present in the specialized bibliography, despite their exceptional character. It is important not to forget technological advances that in the translation industry, as in other sectors, will surely lead to the appearance of evaluations carried out almost exclusively by machines, adding a layer of intricacy to this already arduous process.

Exclusively human or not, there is still much to be learned about the subjects participating in translation assessment. A step forward is taken here, considering the different evaluators not only when acting according to their usual creed, but also in the scenarios in which they move.

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