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Constructing Standards in Communities: Tutors' and Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices on an MA Translation Course

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Quality Assurance and Assessment Practices in Translation and Interpreting

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Chapter 11

Constructing Standards in Communities: Tutors' and Students' Perceptions of Assessment Practices on an MA Translation Course

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ABSTRACT

Assessment practices on translation programs provide a valuable lens through which to view current understandings about the nature of translation pedagogy. In the context of competence-based training, the last decade has seen the proliferation of assessment instruments aimed at enhancing students' learning by prioritising competence development and the translation process. Using the University of Westminster as a case study, the authors have sought to provide a clearer insight into the current understandings of translation and assessment practices on the MA Translation courses in the light of the current debates in translation pedagogy. The authors undertook a two-pronged approach by surveying not only the tutors, but also the students. This chapter will present and analyse the findings of the two surveys on assessment practices using the framework of the six tenets of good assessment practice set out by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and, in particular, assess to what extent assessment literacy has been developed.

INTRODUCTION

Translation training in universities has proliferated in the last 20 years. In 1998, Caminade and Pym (quoted in Kelly, 2005, p. 8) listed 250 university programmes in 60 countries as an example of the explosion of courses on offer. In a recent research project, the authors found there were 27 universities in

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the UK alone offering translation training for professional contexts (Huertas Barros & Vine, 2018). The field of translation studies, and along with it translation pedagogy research, has flourished. Much of this translation pedagogy research has been focused on trying to analyse the complex set of skills, attitudes and knowledge which combine to enable translation. This analysis has led to a variety of models (e.g. Kelly, 2002, 2005, 2007; PACTE, 2003, 2005; González Davies, 2004; EMT Expert Group, 2009; Kiraly, 2013) and these in turn have been conceptualised as translator competence. The components of translator competence have then been used to establish the learning outcomes (LOs) for core translation modules.

At the same time as researchers and academics have been honing their models and debating the component aspects of translator competence, universities have recruited tutors to teach translation. Many of these tutors fit the Holroyd's (2000) profile for teachers¹ throughout the HE sector, of being experts in their field of knowledge, but having 'craft' knowledge of assessment, i.e. knowledge gained 'from experience of being assessed and assessing others, any training needed is likely to be minimal' (2000, p. 34). Rust *et al.* use the term 'tacit' knowledge, a term coined by Polanyi in 1958 and later adopted by Nonaka (1991), describing it as 'Deeply rooted in action and often in an individual's commitment to a profession, tacit knowledge consists partly of technical skills based on professional experience, and in a more cognitive dimension, in our ingrained mental models, beliefs and perspectives' (Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003, p. 152). They go on to say that tacit knowledge 'underpin[s] the established normative, "connoisseur" model of assessment—illustrated by the phrase "I cannot describe it, but I know a good piece of work when I see it"' (Rust *et al.*, 2003, p. 152). However, Paran believes that 'intuitions and beliefs are not reliable when complex issues such as teaching and learning are concerned. This is where a research-oriented or evidence-based approach to teaching comes into play' (Paran 2017, p. 501).

In its paper *The EMT Translator Trainer Profile Competences of the trainer in translation* (2013), the European Master's in Translation (EMT) recognised the importance of considering the skills and aptitudes that translator trainers should 'possess or develop' (EMT Expert Group, 2013, p. 1). The paper includes the disparate sets of professional skills that trainers bring to the training and mentions that the trainers are not specialists in education and suggests that 'depending on national regulations, teacher training, either as a formal qualification or additional, bespoke, or specialised teacher training relevant to the course(s) taught is highly desirable' (EMT Expert Group, 2013, p. 1). However, this remains an aspiration not a requirement.

Given the ubiquity of the concept of translator competence in the literature on translation pedagogy and translation studies, including, for example, the inclusion of a model of translator competence in the EMT Expert Group (2009), and given the lack of explicit training in issues relating to translation pedagogy of many tutors in university courses, the authors' main objective is to investigate the current understandings of translation and assessment practices on an MA Translation course. In the light of the data gathered, the authors aim to analyse the extent to which assessment practices being used at present relate to the current debates on translation pedagogy and also the wider debates on assessment in Higher Education (HE). By surveying not only the tutors but also the students on MA Translation courses at the University of Westminster, the authors were able to not only triangulate the tutors' responses, but also to recognise in their research an important aspect of learning and teaching in relation to assessment. In particular, it is only through explicit engagement of both tutors and students in discussions that clear understandings about the nature and purpose of assessment can be created.

ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Assessment practices on translation programmes provide a valuable lens through which to view current understandings about the nature of translation pedagogy. In the introduction to her book *A Handbook for Translator Trainers*, Kelly states that the debate on ‘training translators has only rarely transcended our self-imposed disciplinary borders to take account of the wider issues of higher education and training’ (2005, p. 2). The situation does not seem to have changed much over the last decade despite the recent attention given to assessment in HE. Indeed, in undertaking research for this paper, the authors also found few references that relate the assessment practices in translator education to the wider HE debates on assessment. The authors believe that viewing the discipline-specific practices in this wider context could provide valuable fresh perspectives on the debates within translation studies on how to assess translator competence. The authors also agree with Kelly:

Not only does Translation Studies have things to learn from these general trends, but — given its interest in training — it also has in turn quite a lot to offer current debates on changes in higher education. (Kelly, 2007, p. 129)

It has been recognised that across the HE sector, there is a problem with assessment (Boud, 2010; Assessment Standards Knowledge exchange [ASKe], n.d; HEA, 2012; Price, Rust, O’Donovan, Hindley, & Bryant, 2012). In the 2016 National Student Survey (HEFCE, 2016), assessment remained the area of greatest student dissatisfaction. While students had a satisfaction rating for the teaching on their courses of 87%, the rating for assessment was 74%. This is the lowest rating for all the areas surveyed and well below the benchmark for acceptability set by the universities at 85%. Assessment has been given the lowest rating in all the surveys since 2010. Each of the papers quoted above sets out a list of premises or proposals which if followed would improve assessment practice. Boud and Associates (2010) make seven proposals, the first of which states students should be ‘inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education’ and that ‘[s]tudents and teachers become responsible partners’. The UK ASKe (n.d.) in its position paper states that ‘assessment is central as it frames student learning’ and as its second premise proposes ‘assessment is more effective when students understand the assessment process’ (p. 2).

In 2012, the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) published ‘*A Marked Improvement: Transforming Assessment in Higher Education*’, which following on from the work of ASKe, sets out six tenets for assessment (HEA, 2012, p.21):

1. Promoting assessment for learning. This includes considering the balance of formative and summative assessment, where formative assessment provides opportunities for practising.
2. Developing assessment fit for purpose. Assessment should align with the stated LOs; assessment should not prioritise reliability over validity, for example exams should not be chosen as the assessment primarily for reasons of reliability but because they do reflect the LOs.
3. Recognising that assessment lacks precision. This means recognising that not all learning is accessible to assessment and that trying to measure all the LOs can constrain the assessment process. When assessing complex LOs, professional judgements can be used. However, these professional judgements need to be constructed and agreed on within appropriate communities.

4. Constructing standards in communities. There should be dialogue between tutors and students to ensure there is a shared understanding of assessment and a mutual trust is established.
5. Integrating assessment literacy into course design. This means that within the teaching process, the subject of assessment is explicitly addressed. Both the students and tutors involved should understand the skills required in the assessment process. Understanding these skills will allow students to be autonomous learners.
6. Ensuring professional judgements are reliable, i.e. academic judgement is a 'holistic judgement rather than mechanistic processes. Academic, disciplinary and professional communities should set up opportunities and processes, such as meetings, workshops and groups to regularly share examples and discuss assessment standards.'

Although it is more than five years since the HEA published its paper encouraging universities to transform their assessment practices, there continue to be significant problems with assessment. The HEA published a report in 2016 of a summit into the changes in assessment practice and admitted that 'assessment remains the area perhaps least effectively engaged by efforts at change' (Elkington, 2016). The report suggests that the key to improvement in assessment is assessment literacy and the importance of providing staff with opportunities to develop their understanding of assessment literacy.

As the brief outline of the six tenets shows, there is considerable overlap between them. The tenet of 'assessment literacy' could be construed of as an umbrella tenet under which all the other tenets must be gathered in order for it to be fully realised. Smith, Worsfold, Davies, Fisher, and McPhail (2013) conceptualise assessment literacy as the capacity of students to develop a 'multi-dimensional' set of skills and understandings with respect to assessment. These were divided into three areas. Firstly, an understanding of 'the purpose of assessment and how it connects with their learning trajectory' (Smith et al., 2013, p. 45). Secondly, students need 'to be aware of the processes of assessment' (Smith et al., 2013, p. 45), including an understanding of the criteria and standards, and how these processes affect their ability to respond to the tasks set. Thirdly, the students need to be given opportunities to practise evaluating their own work so that they 'can learn to identify what is good about their work and what could be improved' (Smith et al., 2013, p. 45). Smith et al. focus on the assessment literacy of students, but as Elkington (2016, p. 4), states raising awareness of assessment literacy should 'integrate[s] developments' within the staff and student bodies.

In order to develop assessment literacy, both staff and students need to learn about and reflect on all the tenets and how these tenets will impact on their engagement in the assessment process. Assessment literacy ensures transparency of assessment processes and thereby confidence on behalf of the tutors and trust on behalf of the students that the process is both valid and reliable. For institutions to be transparent, those responsible for assessment will need to reflect on their tacit understandings of the process and in shared communities of practice expose them to scrutiny and together construct shared agreed understandings. As Elkington (2016) states the 'key first step will be encouraging all relevant staff to review their own assessment practice' (p. 15) which will involve turning their craft or tacit knowledge into shared standards within their communities of practice.

ASSESSING TRANSLATOR COMPETENCE

In the context of competence-based training, the last decade has seen the proliferation of assessment instruments aimed at enhancing students' learning by prioritising competence development and the translation process. In the light of the current debates in translation pedagogy and using the University of Westminster as a case study, the authors have sought to provide a clearer insight into the current understandings of translation and assessment practices on the MA Translation courses. The integration of competence-based training in translator education has led to a gradual shift in focus from the product of translation to the process of translating. This translation process has been broken down into several interrelated areas of competence or sub-competences that translation scholars have conceptualised in several models of translator competence (e.g. Kelly, 2002, 2005, 2007; PACTE, 2003, 2005; EMT Expert Group, 2009). However, despite the general consensus on the main skills or sub-competences, many of the existing models 'do not describe its operationalisation in sufficient detail (its components and indicators, [...] performance levels, etc.) to allow for the planning of teaching' (Galán-Mañas & Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 68)².

The shift in focus has influenced the way translator educators perceive the function of assessment, with the last two decades witnessing innovations in assessment and feedback in translation across Europe. 'Traditional' assessment practices to judge students' performance (i.e. summative product assessment only) are being questioned and there is an increasing number of research papers promoting new forms of assessments. These include diagnostic and formative assessment, summative assessment with a formative function, peer and self-assessment, translation commentaries, reflective diaries, students' portfolios, or translation process recordings of students or professionals while they are translating (Hurtado Albir, 1999/2003, 2007, 2015a, b; González Davies, 2004; Kelly, 2005; Way, 2008, 2014; Galán Mañas & Hurtado Albir, 2015; Huertas Barros & Vine, 2015, 2016, 2018; Lisaitė et al., 2016). However, given the complexity of assessment in which subjectivity plays an important part, there is a need for further research (González Davies, 2004, p. 31) in the search for more objective, valid and reliable product- and process-oriented assessment instruments.

The fundamental function of assessment in the teaching and learning process is witnessed by the number of dedicated edited volumes and papers addressing translator competence assessment and assessment issues in translation (Schäffner & Adab, 2000; Martínez Melis & Hurtado Albir, 2001; Tsagari & van Deemter, 2013). Drawing on the dichotomy of bridging the gap between pedagogical and professional assessment, some research also explores process-oriented and product-oriented evaluation approaches (Orlando, 2011, 2012). In the context of competence-based training, recent research suggests a range of competence assessment procedures, instruments and tasks for diagnostic, formative and summative assessment in translator training (Galán Mañas & Hurtado Albir, 2015).

Contributions to summative assessment include some proposals of frameworks for this type of assessment (Beeby, 2000, p. 185-198; Adab, 2000, p. 215-228; McAlester, 2000, p. 229-243), as well as empirical case studies at BA (Pavani, 2016) and MA levels (Klimkowski & Klimkowska, 2012; Huertas Barros & Vine, 2016, 2018). In the last decade, translation scholars have also devoted special attention to formative assessment of translation processes, with some proposals on self-assessment, self-criticism and decision-making frameworks (Way, 2008, 2009, 2014; Prieto Ramos, 2014). Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow (2012, 2013) analyse alternatives to traditional product assessment and suggest assessment methods

that focus on assessing translation processes in laboratory-based and workplace projects. This research in translator competence assessment shows increased acceptance of competence-based understanding of translation as well as increased awareness of pedagogical issues among translation scholars, including assessment.

EMPIRICAL CASE STUDY: TUTORS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES ON AN MA TRANSLATION COURSE

This section will therefore present and analyse the findings of the two surveys informing the comparative case study of assessment practices on the core translation modules at the University of Westminster. The case study aims to provide a clearer insight into the current understandings of translation practice and assessment practices on the MA Translation courses. More specifically, the authors aim to investigate the following three main areas: 1) If and to what extent the concept of competence-based understanding of translation has been adopted by tutors and students; 2) How and where the two groups' perceptions on assessment practices converge and diverge; 3) How and in what ways this understanding of translation affects beliefs and attitudes to assessment practices. This section will present and analyse the findings of the two surveys using the framework of the six tenets set out by the HEA and, in particular, assess to what extent assessment literacy has been developed.

Research Methodology

The authors' case study draws on research methodologies successfully used in empirical studies in translator education (e.g. Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013; Huertas Barros, 2013; Huertas Barros & Vine, 2016, 2018; Huertas Barros & Buendía Castro, 2018). The case study presented in this paper is the first phase of a wider research project into assessment practices on MA Translation courses offered in the UK (Huertas Barros & Vine, 2018). This case study consisted of three stages: 1) a preliminary survey conducted with MA translation tutors (n=16) teaching on the core translation modules (Huertas Barros & Vine, 2016), 2) a revamped assessment grid in response to tutors' feedback, and 3) a survey carried out with MA translation students (n=53) where the changes to the assessment practices and refined feedback sheet were tested. Both courses, i.e. the MA in Specialised Translation and the MA in Translation and Interpreting, were included in the case study.

The survey of tutors (n=16) was carried out in 2015 and the results were used as a basis for consultation and discussion amongst the teaching staff on the university's MA courses. Translation tutors actively engaged in dialogue about assessment standards and processes. As a consequence of this consultation, changes to the assessment practices and feedback sheet were made in response to the tutors' feedback and implemented the subsequent academic year (i.e. 2016-2017) (see section Refined Assessment Criteria). The MA students were then surveyed at the end of that academic year (n=53). Therefore, the student survey not only allowed for triangulation with the original findings, but was also able to discover if the changes sought by the tutors were supported by the students. The sites of divergence in the perspectives of the two groups can indicate areas where a shared understanding of and mutual trust in assessment may need to be strengthened.

The questionnaires were designed with predominately closed questions, but some open-ended questions were also included to provide qualitative information about the rationale behind participants' responses.

Both questionnaires were designed using GoogleForms and followed a similar structure to allow for triangulation of the information. Both surveys included the following sections: Section A) General details: qualifications and experience; Section B) Tutors/Students' perceptions of assessment; and Section C) MA Translation assessment criteria and feedback sheet used on the core translation modules.

Analysis and Discussion of the Findings of the Comparative Case Study

The structure of the survey lies at the basis of this section, which is divided into four subsections. The first subsection gives some background information about the MA in Specialised Translation / MA in Translation and Interpreting courses and the participants. In the second subsection, the authors provide an insight into tutors' and students' perceptions of assessment practices. Some of the aspects explored include perceptions of and attitudes to: 1) The extent to which it is important to assess the different areas of translator competence in pieces of summative assessment; 2) The implications of assessing the translation product or the translation process; 3) The extent to which exam performance is considered an accurate representation of the students' typical translation competence; 4) The areas of competence which are most accurately measured by an exam; 5) The assessment instruments and tasks used on the core translation modules; 6) Proposed changes to the weighting of such assessment tasks. The third subsection analyses the refined assessment criteria and feedback sheet used on the core translation modules. The final subsection discusses tutors' and students' perceptions of the levels of objectivity versus subjectivity involved in marking.

Background Information About the MA Translation Courses and the Participants

The University of Westminster is a particularly interesting academic institution in which to carry out a case study, because the present MA courses were developed out of a long history of professional training in translation. It was established as the first polytechnic in the UK and offered the first specialised training course in Translation (Pedrola, 1999, p.19). This focus on training for the professions, which polytechnics promoted, has again become the focus of debate about reforms in HE. The university has a long tradition of using professional translators as tutors on its core translation modules and these modules were designed to offer practical training reflected in the emphasis on professional experience in those teaching on the courses. However, in the last decade and certainly since the introduction of the EMT, there has been a growing awareness of models of translator competence and changes have occurred at course level such as the introduction of new modules, including CAT, Audiovisual Translation and Project Management. This reflects the need to offer training in a wide range of the competences identified.

The responses to the questions on the qualifications and experience of the tutors surveyed showed that the majority (87.5%) had an academic qualification in Translation (i.e. Diploma in Translation, BA, MA and/or PhD) and 68.8% were members of a professional association. Fifty per cent of the tutors had been teaching on translation modules for 10 years or more, and 18.8% had been part of the teaching team for between 6-9 years. Only 12.5% of the staff who completed the survey were relatively new to the course (i.e. 1-2 years). Virtually all tutors (93.8%) had worked in the translation industry (either as freelance translators, in-house translator and/or as project managers) for between 6-9 years (26.7%) or for 10 or more years (73.3%). In most cases (73.3%), tutors combined their teaching with freelancing work and over two thirds had attended workshops and/or training courses on teaching translation skills, pedagogical approaches or assessment practices. As for students who completed the survey, 26.4% had previously

completed a BA in Translation and 62.3% had experience working as translators (i.e. volunteer translator - 60.6%; freelance translator - 39.4%; in-house translator - 27.3%; other, including internships - 9.1%).

The core translation modules cover a wide range of specialised technical and institutional texts. Before the first survey was conducted, the core translation modules were assessed by a combination of two pieces of coursework and one end-of-year examination. Translation coursework consisted of two written translation assignments (350-500 words) worth 30% of the overall module mark (i.e. 15% each). The examination consisted of a 3-hour, open book, translation on a computer (650-750 words). Formative assessments (i.e. translation assignments and other translation-related tasks) were also provided to students on a regular basis.

Tutors' and Students' Perceptions of Summative Assessment

To gain insight into tutors' and students' awareness of translator competence, the first question in this section asked both tutors and students to rank the different areas of translator competence in terms of how important it is to assess them in the pieces of summative assessment used on the core translation modules. For this purpose, the authors provided a definition of each area of translator competence in both surveys based on the definitions suggested by Kelly in her model of translator competence (2005: 32-33). As shown in Table 1, the data demonstrates a fairly strong correlation (correlation coefficient of 0.7385) between tutors' and students' answers. Students' understanding of translation and the concept of translator competences predominantly comes from the tutors, which may explain the correlation between their answers. However, 62.3% of the students had had some translation experience as translators beyond the MA course. A follow-up multiple choice question revealed that 60.6% of these students had worked as volunteer translators, 39.4% had worked as freelance translators and 27.3% had had professional in-house translation experience, so their responses can also be seen as their own evaluation.

One of the points which varies is the importance the students attach to intercultural competence compared to the tutors (2nd and 5th respectively). This could be a result of the students' own experience with many students coming to England from other countries to study and thus being aware of the different cultures in a more immediate manner. It could also be related to the students' perceptions of translation and their previous translation experience. Furthermore, one of the option modules offered on the course

Table 1. The extent to which it is important to assess the following competences in pieces of summative assessment⁴

Translator Competences	Tutors' Ranking	Students' Ranking
Language competence	1 st	1 st
Intercultural competence	5 th	2 nd
Professional competence	2 nd	3 rd
Information mining	3 rd	4 th
Thematic competence	4 th	4 th
Strategic competence	3 rd	5 th
Technological competence	6 th	6 th
Social / interpersonal competence	7 th	7 th

focuses on intercultural competence exclusively and the fact that it is offered may influence students' perceptions about the significance of this competence.

The second main difference was related to the ranking of the strategic competence, which tutors ranked higher than students (3rd vs. 5th respectively). The analysis of the tutors' responses revealed this sub-competence had the widest variation in rankings, which reflected the fact that tutors did not all believe this component was as critical as the translator competence models suggest (e.g. Kelly, 2002, 2005; PACTE, 2003, 2005; EMT Expert Group, 2009). Despite the survey having provided a definition of this competence³, it is possible the respondents were still unclear about what exactly it encompasses. This lack of clarity may have been reflected in the tutors' responses, or perhaps the tutors felt that strategic competence is not directly assessed, but is reflected in the products. Since tutors are transmitting their understanding of translator competence to students, it is possible that they also transmit their lack of clarity, which may explain why students also placed strategic competence towards the bottom of the ranking. The lack of consistency in the rating of the strategic competence may also reflect the issue raised by Galán-Mañas and Hurtado Albir (2015, p. 68) that translator competence has not been 'operationalised' and as such it is difficult for the tutors and by extension the students to have clear understandings of some areas of competence.

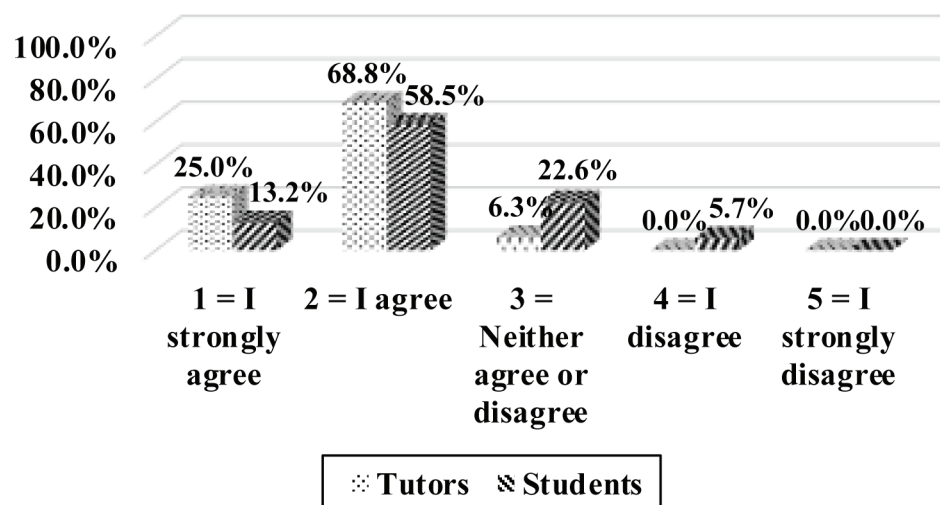
The ranking given to the translator competences mirrors those competences which are explicitly addressed in the LOs of the modules. The exception to this was Language Competence, a competence that it is assumed students have on admission to the courses and so not identified as an LO. As de Groot (2000) states 'not all components that can be distinguished in a criterion task will need to be trained because a number of them may be mastered already at the onset of training' (p. 54). These responses were also broadly in agreement with what tutors thought was measured most accurately by an examination (see Figure 5), which evidences the fact that tutors felt that those competences which are most important to assess are indeed the ones which are assessed. On the other hand, some tutors raised the need for complementary assessment methods that consider other important aspects of translator competence, especially social/interpersonal competence.

In response to the question asking if assessing a translation (i.e. the product of the translation process) was an accurate reflection of the students' competence, there is a tendency for the tutors to be more positive in their evaluation of the assessments used on the core translation modules (see Figure 1). Except for one tutor, they all (+93%) agree or strongly agree that assessing the product of the translation process is an accurate representation of students' translator competence compared to 71.7% of students.

A significantly higher number of students (28.3%) chose an ambivalent response or disagreed, while only 6.3% of the tutors expressed ambivalence regarding the validity of the product as representative of students' competence. The lower levels of positivity about the assessment methods could reflect the fact that students do not feel clear about the assessment practice and why it is valid. The HEA tenet 'constructing standards in communities' (HEA, 2012) suggests that if students are more involved in the discussions of the assessment practice, they will have higher levels of trust in the assessment and feel more positive about its use, so this discrepancy could indicate that there is a need for increased discussion and a more collaborative approach to constructing assessments.

In most cases, tutors and students provided a very similar range of qualitative responses to justify their views. Most tutors believe that the product 'is the only sensible way to assess students', although some tutors felt that the product does not give an account of certain competences such as the social/interpersonal competence or technological competence. Students felt that the product is what future clients and employers will assess, and it is 'the overall summary of my entire work.' However, the tutors' responses

Figure 1. Do you agree that assessing translations (i.e. the *PRODUCT* of the translation process) accurately reflects students' translator competences?



were more emphatically positive about the ability of the product to assess translator competence. The students raised the issue of the subjective nature of the marking, which according to them would not necessarily reflect the translator competence: 'Not always. Some assessment has been very subjective and focused more on the way a tutor liked to write'⁵. One student was also concerned that the tutors may assess without having fully researched the subject area and, consequently, being less informed. These concerns with the competence of the assessors were not raised by the tutors themselves. The fact that both the students and tutors used the same language to describe the issues with assessing the product, shows that there is some shared understanding of assessment and, from this, it can be inferred that there is a degree of 'assessment literacy' (HEA, 2012). However, the concerns about the validity again show that more needs to be done to ensure mutual trust i.e. students and tutors need to engage in a dialogue about standards and assessment procedures ('Constructing standards in communities', HEA, 2012).

Both groups also agreed that the translation product is the most easily managed method of assessing translator competence within an academic institution, with 75.1% of tutors and 77.3% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing on this point (see Figure 2). The tutors' responses were more emphatic, since nearly twice as many respondents (i.e. 43.8% of tutors compared to 24.5% of students) strongly agreed. A higher proportion of students (18.9% compared to 12.5% of tutors) chose an ambivalent response.

When asked if assessing the translation process is an important aspect of assessing translator competence within an academic institution (see Figure 3), both tutors and students provided the same range of responses (nearly 70% of tutors and students agreed or strongly agreed). The qualitative data gathered from both groups reflect the importance of the translation process during the training and the value of assessing the process as part of formative assessment, with some students stating that 'it is the only way to understand the weaknesses and strengths in the translation.' Some tutors concurred with students in this regard, and stated that 'without consistent good process there cannot be consistent good products' and that 'it [the translation process] offers explicit learning opportunities and allows students to reflect on strategy.' Those students who disagreed felt that 'as long as the product is good, the process you use to get there is not particularly relevant or important.' In a quarter of the students' responses, they

Figure 2. Do you agree that assessing a translation *PRODUCT* is the most easily managed method of assessing translator competence within an academic institution?

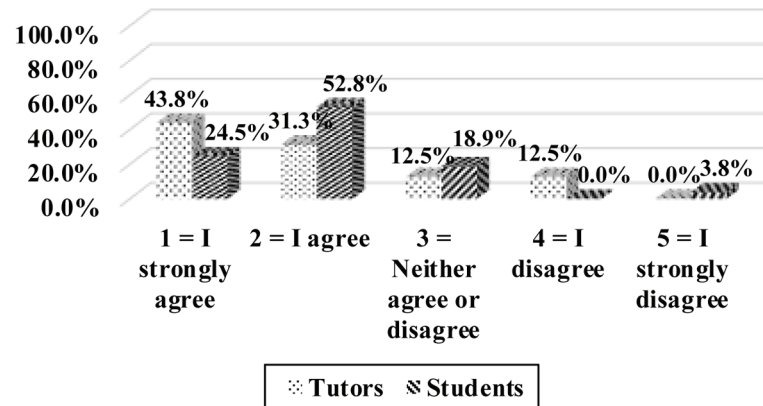
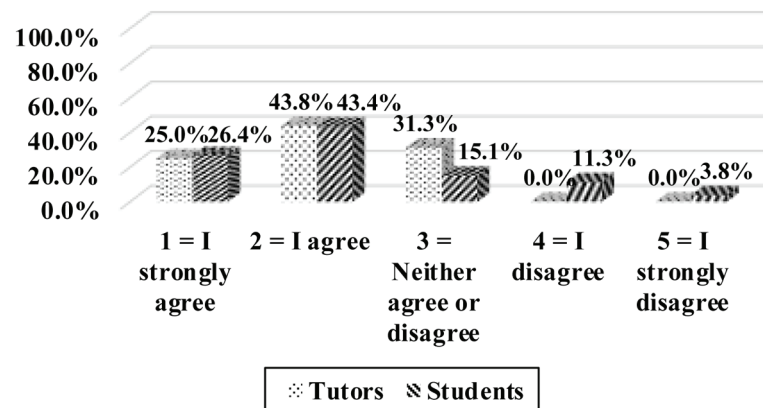


Figure 3. Do you agree that assessing the translation *PROCESS* is an important aspect of assessing translator competence within an academic institution?



stated that the process should be taught but it should not be assessed, in other words, they believed the process should be discussed in class as part of the ongoing formative feedback/ assessment they received throughout the module, but only the final product should be assessed since ‘this is how our work will be judged as professionals.’

While both groups’ responses highlight the importance of ‘formative assessment’ as an indication of how students are performing at each stage, only 12% of tutors and 8% of students explicitly stated the process should be an important aspect of the summative assessment. The students suggested that taking the process into account may allow tutors to see the reasoning behind choices which they may not agree with. The qualitative responses showed a clear understanding of the distinction between product and process which in turn indicates that some aspects of assessment literacy are already integrated into the core translation modules.

As shown in Figure 4, there is general agreement between both tutors and students that exam performance is not necessarily an accurate representation of students’ typical translator competence. Both

Figure 4. Do think your exam performance is an accurate representation of your (students') typical translator competence?

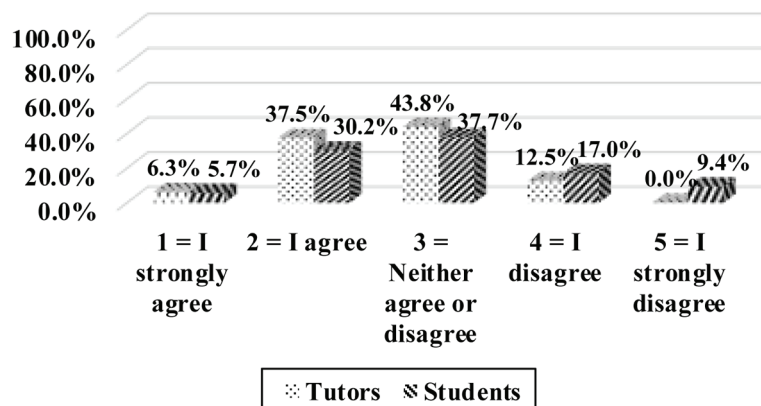
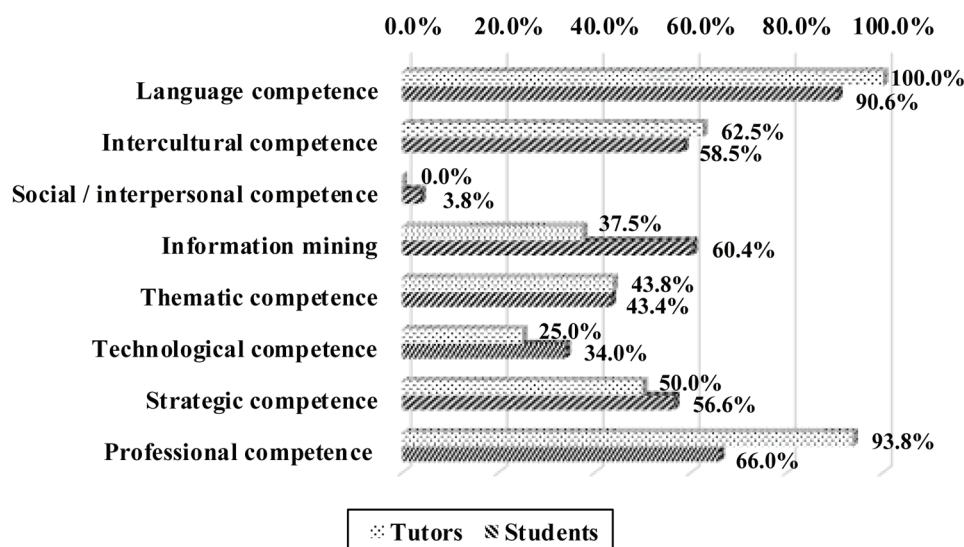


Figure 5. Which of the following competences are most accurately measured by an examination?



groups are less certain about the accuracy of exams to represent translator competence than they were of the 'product' in general. Only 5.7% of the students fully agreed with the statement that 'exam performance is an accurate representation of [their] translator competence' and 30.2% agreed, giving a total of 35.9% agreeing to some degree. At the same time, more than one in three students (37.7%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 26.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The students' qualitative comments were even more cautious in their assessment of the accuracy of exams to reflect their translator competence than was evidenced in the quantitative information. Of the students who had not strongly agreed with the proposition in the qualitative question, 60% did not agree that the exam was a true reflection of their typical translator competence. These students felt that exams were not representative of the conditions under which they would normally translate, e.g. additional pressure and time constraints, and no opportunity to put the translation aside before proof reading: 'As a freelance I would have the option

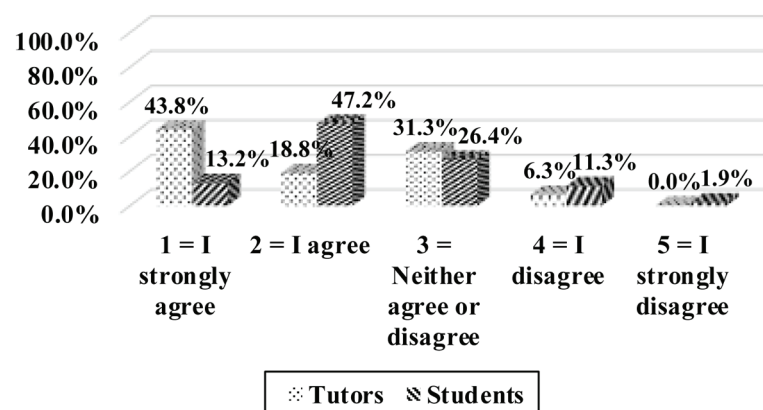
of turning down a text which one does not have in an exam, 3 hours solid sat at a computer does not fit in with my working pattern, nor does it provide ample time to do additional research where needed.’ The inability to put the translation aside and continue to work on it at a later stage with a fresh mind was mentioned by several students. Of the remaining students, 25% agreed exams did represent their typical translator competence, but they had reservations in line with the students who disagreed, and only 10% of those who wrote comments agreed without reservation, while 5% were unsure.

With regard to the tutors’ perceptions, 43.8% agreed that exam performance was an accurate representation of translator competence, while 56.3% of tutors expressed ambivalence or disagreement with this statement (see Figure 4). This ambivalence about exams is also reflected in the response to questions about the assessment weightings (see Figure 6). Some tutors pointed out that some students produce excellent coursework but do not perform equally well in the exam. One tutor added that ‘exam conditions are generally not representative of the translation work done by a professional, whereas coursework is.’

This ambivalence in regard to the use of exams from both the tutors’ and students’ perspective indicates that there is a need to re-assess the validity and reliability of this assessment method. A re-assessment of the use of exams is in line with the HEAs second tenet, ensuring assessment is fit for purpose, which states ‘there needs to be recognition of the difficulties inherent in marking systems, and the imbalance between validity and reliability needs to also be addressed through an increased emphasis on assessment validity (HEA, 2012, p. 19).

Despite the ambivalence reflected in the previous question, tutors and students believe that language and professional competence are the competences which are most accurately measured by an exam (language competence – tutors [100%], students [90.6%]; professional competence – tutors [93.8%], students [66%]) (see Figure 5). As shown in Table 1, both tutors and students rated these two competences as part of the top three competences to be assessed in the pieces of summative assessment. According to both groups, exams can also reflect students’ intercultural competence (tutors [62.5%], students [58.5%]). However, respondents agree that exams are not indicative of students’ social / interpersonal competence, and do not measure very accurately other areas such as technological or thematic competences. Nearly twice as many students (60.4% compared to 37.5% of tutors) believe that exams reflect their ability to

Figure 6. Do you agree that the assessment instruments and tasks used on the core translation modules (i.e. two pieces of coursework and one exam) can accurately measure the level of translator competence attained by students?



search for information (i.e. information mining). This mismatch in perceptions could be due to the fact that students may feel the research process carried out prior to the examination, when the exam topic is announced, makes use of their information mining competence and is therefore also assessed by the exam.

As can be seen in Figure 6, the quantitative data shows that tutors are more positive than the students about the accuracy of the assessment methods (i.e. two pieces of translation coursework and one exam) to accurately measure the level of translator competence attained by students, since nearly half (43.8%) strongly agreed, whereas 13.2% of students strongly agreed. However, a similar percentage of tutors (62.6%) and students (60.4%) generally agree with this statement, and there is also strong resemblance in the number of tutors and students giving ambivalent responses (tutors – 31.3%; students – 26.4%). Those tutors who did not strongly agree provided many of the same reasons as the students' for being concerned about the ability of coursework and exams involving translation only to fully reflect the whole range of translator competences. To solve this problem, these tutors suggested the inclusion of alternative assessment instruments that reflect the learning process (e.g. attaching to the translation a short commentary or annotations in which students justify their decision-making) and that are representative of translator competences which are generally overlooked (i.e. incorporating a group task to be able to assess social / interpersonal competence).

There were 35 qualitative responses from the students explaining why they thought the assessment was or was not an accurate reflection of their translator competence, 12 of whom did not make explicit in their answers if they agreed or disagreed with the question, thereby leaving 23 clear responses. Of these, eight students agreed that the assessment pattern did accurately reflect their translator competence, six students completely disagreed, two students were very positive about the coursework but very strongly against the use of exams, and the rest of the students were in agreement with the assessment pattern but had reservations such as the weighting given to the exam and whether the assessment assessed all competences.

Students referred to the same issues to argue two contradictory points of view. For example, some students argued that since the exam and coursework were two very different assessments, this meant that they could not be used together to give an accurate account of the students' ability. However, other students said that because the two assessment types were so different, it meant they were able to assess different and complementary competences and so gave a more accurate account. This pattern of resorting to the same issues to argue opposite points of view continued as some students felt the assessment instruments were not an accurate representation of their continuous development as translators, whereas others felt that they in fact allowed the assessment of different stages of the learning process. Moreover, some students did not see the exam as a valid assessment method as it did not reflect the situation in the professional world (i.e. a 3-hour translation) while other students felt that the examination pressure reflected the professional context and a realistic translation brief tests what students could achieve in the working world. As did several of the tutors, some students stated the translation coursework and exam do not assess all translator competences. The students' responses made confident and accurate use of the concepts underpinning translator competence and the dichotomies in their views reflect the debates in translator education literature, thus demonstrating that translator competences are well integrated into student understanding of translation. It also shows that students have an understanding of 'the purpose of assessment and how it connects with their learning trajectory', one of Smith et al.'s assessment literacy indicators (Smith et al., 2013, p. 45).

Despite most tutors agreeing that the assessment methods used accurately measure students' level of translator competence, the percentage of tutors who agreed with the weightings allocated to the pieces

of summative assessment on the core translation modules (i.e. translation coursework 1 – 15%, translation coursework 2 – 15%, exam 70%) was identical to the percentage of tutors who disagreed (i.e. 44%). Tutors felt the weighting allocated to the translation exam was excessively high and more importance should be attached to the coursework elements. They also felt coursework mirrors more accurately real-life translation assignments where translators have access to all resources and take time to go through various stages of the translation process, while exam conditions and the attendant time limitations do not always allow students to perform to the best of their abilities. The results obtained from the survey of tutors were presented and discussed in breakout-groups at a staff workshop on curriculum assessment and enhancement. The staff decided to reduce the weighting attached to the exam to 60% and to introduce a progressive weighting for the two pieces of coursework, giving greater weighting to the second piece of coursework to reflect students' learning curve (i.e. translation coursework 1 – 15%, translation coursework 2 – 25%, exam – 60%). In the survey of students, 83% of respondents strongly supported the changes (see Figure 7).

Refined Assessment Criteria and Feedback Used on the Core Translation Modules

The final section of the survey focused on the MA Translation assessment criteria and feedback sheet used on the core translation modules. The tutors' survey results (see Figure 8) showed that while 81.3% of tutors felt the assessment criteria used on the core translation modules were clear to them, 44% would add or remove certain elements to refine the translation feedback sheet.

The original feedback sheet included the following criteria: comprehension, accuracy, readability (style/register), terminology/lexis, grammar/syntax, spelling/punctuation, and presentation. Tutors felt that accuracy (66.7%) and readability (55.6%) were the categories requiring further clarifications or refinements. The survey and the subsequent attendant course team discussions held at the curriculum assessment and enhancement staff workshop (see previous section) resulted in valuable revisions to the translation feedback sheet used for formative and summative assignments on all core translation modules. A revised rubric providing a more detailed definition of each criterion as well as examples of different issues included under each criterion were introduced to ensure that more focused and transparent feedback was provided. The revisions included a clarification of the criteria 'comprehension' and 'accuracy' to specify the corresponding stage of the translation process (i.e. 'comprehension' [decoding of ST]; 'accuracy' [encoding of TT]). The criteria 'readability (style/register)' was refined to exclusively include

Figure 7. Students' view on the proposed changes to the weighting of assessment tasks on the core translation modules

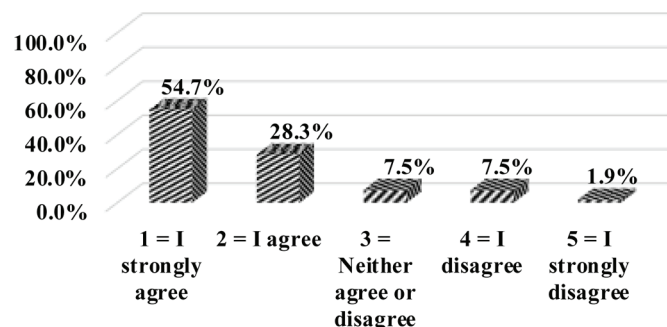
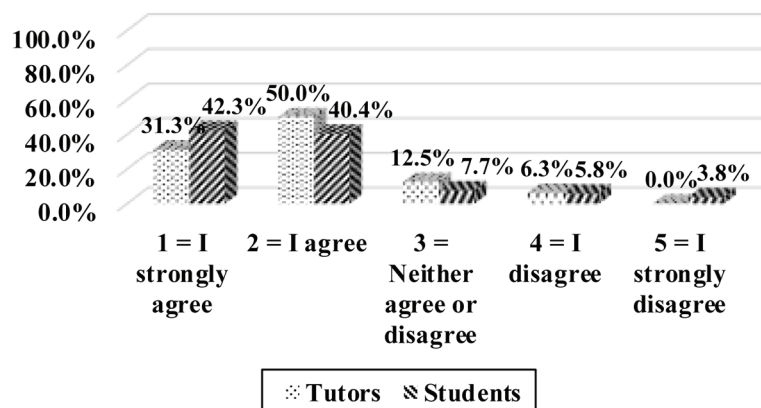


Figure 8. Tutors' and students' views on the clarity of the assessment criteria and parameters used on the core translation modules



stylistic aspects of a translation (i.e. register was removed from this category), and the criteria originally entitled 'presentation' was also removed from the feedback sheet. Instead, two new assessment categories (i.e. 'compliance with brief' and 'preparation for final delivery') were added to articulate more fully the professional context in which learning was situated. These two new categories accounted for register and presentation respectively as examples of the type of issues included under each criterion. These refinements were tested with the new cohort of students with positive results. A total of 82.7% students felt the assessment criteria used in the translation modules were clearly defined for them as students and 88.2% would not implement any further changes following the foregoing refinements. The initial tutors' survey, including consultations on how the assessment criteria were and should be understood, then revising and sharing the refined criteria and feedback sheet was an important first step in raising assessment literacy with the staff group. This process also follows the one suggested by the HEA in its sixth tenet, ensuring professional judgements are reliable, by giving the staff group the opportunity to share and discuss academic standards.

The revamped criteria and feedback sheet were subsequently tested with students. The students' opinions were gathered via the student survey and further discussion at course committee level, both of which provide a valuable first stage in engaging students in a process of constructing standards in communities.

Tutors' and Students' Perceptions of the Levels of Objectivity vs. Subjectivity Involved in Marking

Both surveys included questions about what the respondents felt was the balance between objectivity and subjectivity involved in assessment both in an ideal situation and in practice. When the authors designed the questions on objectivity and subjectivity, particularly in the context of the criteria employed in assessments and assessment in general, they had in mind a model in which objectivity was achievable when an aspect of the translation could be construed as 'right' or 'wrong'. These would be the aspects which would lend themselves to being marked on a marking grid. The authors also recognised that some aspects of the translation could not be given a clear right/ wrong evaluation and these aspects were subjective as opposed to objective. However, the authors' understanding of subjective assessment was assessment which

relied on professional judgement. This professional judgement is formed of ‘tacit’ knowledge (Nonaka, 1991) that has gone through ‘a sharing of experience–socialisation processes’ (Rust et al., 2003, p.152) involving discussion with other professionals in informal and formal mentoring, in marking moderation sessions or in staff development workshops, so that individual understanding becomes standardised.

In response to the question on the ideal balance between objectivity and subjectivity, over 81% of students either strongly agreed or agreed that marking should be completely objective (see Figure 9). However, when tutors were asked the same question, 43.5% felt marking should be completely objective or felt the balance should be 10%:90% subjective/objective (12.5% and 31.3% respectively). A further 25% felt the balance should be 20%:80% subjective/objective and nearly 20% of tutors felt that balance should be 50%:50% subjective/objective. These figures show there is a substantial mismatch between the students and tutors in their understandings of what are acceptable levels of subjectivity in assessment, which can be explained in the light of the different interpretation tutors and students seem to have of such concepts. The qualitative responses (see below) seem to indicate tutors refer to ‘professional experience/ judgement’, whereas students seem to take ‘subjective’ to be the tutor’s personal opinion or preference.

This disparity between tutors and students is found when both groups were asked about what they considered was the actual balance in practice (see Figure 10). Here both groups felt that the level of objectivity was lower in practice than it should be in an ideal situation. None of the tutors felt that their marking was completely or even 10%:90% subjective/objective. The students agreed that no marking was in practice completely objective, but over a quarter felt that the marking was 10%:90% subjective/objective. Half of the tutors believed that their translation marking was 20%:80% subjective/objective and another quarter believed that their marking was 30%:70% subjective/objective, which left the final quarter believing their assessment was 40% to 60% subjective.

The students had the expectation that assessment should be and is more objective than the tutors believe it should be or is. Given the conception of subjective explained in the opening paragraph, it is not surprising that the tutors, even in an ideal situation, were comfortable with levels of subjective evaluation in the assessment process ranging between 30-60%. However, as the students’ responses below show, they have a very different conceptualisation of ‘subjective,’ one which would lead them to see subjectivity as a weakness in the assessment. And this would undermine the students’ perceptions of

Figure 9. Students’ views on the requirement of a level of objectivity of a 100% and the actual balance in practice

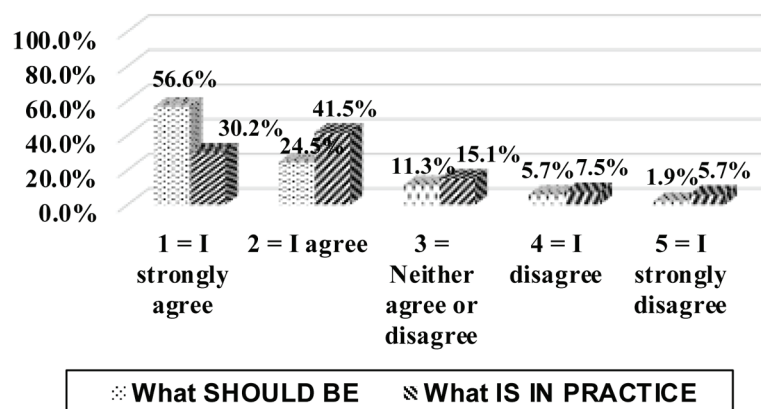
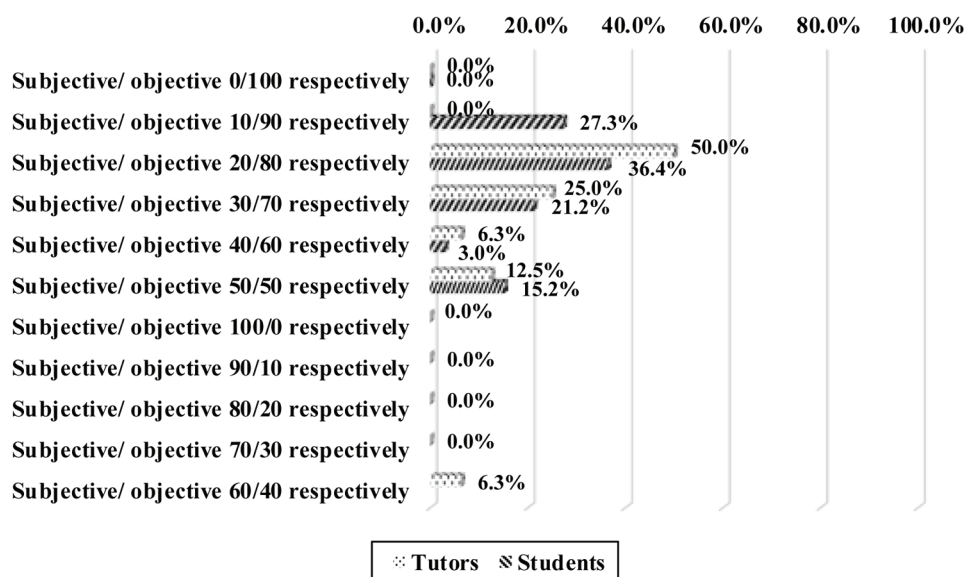


Figure 10. Tutors' and students' perception of the balance between 'subjective' and 'objective' in the assessment practices on the core translation modules



the reliability of the final marks and, therefore, the students felt that ideally there should be much lower levels of subjectivity.

The students provided 20 reasons for believing that marking was not completely objective. Many of the students recognised that it is the nature of the assessment that the marking is unlikely to be completely objective and some subjectivity is 'inevitable'. The reasons the students gave could be divided into four categories: tutor preference, differences (i.e. discrepancies) between tutors, tutor error and anonymity. Half of the reasons given relate to the issue of tutor preference. The students felt that 'markers have specific likes and dislikes that can influence them in their final assessment of the text' and that 'every teacher/person has a personal point of view about language', so that the 'marking process will inevitably have much to do with a teacher's taste in language and style'. There is a sense in the students' responses that these likes and dislikes are arbitrary in that they refer only to the individual and do not relate to or respond to wider professional standards. One student commented 'On more than one occasion, a teacher demonstrated that what they thought was good on one occasion, they had then changed their minds about on another. So, in that respect, the marking process cannot necessarily be all that objective, as much as one would hope the intentions of the process to be.' There does not seem to be a recognition that the same translation solution to the same problem might not be appropriate in different translation contexts. Students felt that the tutors' preferences were excessively rigid and did not allow for the recognition that alternative versions were also acceptable. One student wrote 'Some teachers are very good at marking objectively and accepting that there can be many different but equally good versions of the TT. However, many others mark you down if you do not completely comply with what they think is the appropriate style/tone and correct terminology.' One student felt that the criteria used were themselves inherently subjective, commenting 'I feel that while the assessment criteria are very useful in helping the marker to give an objective evaluation of the end product, it is almost impossible for them to be completely

objective.’ In particular, this student felt that criteria such as ‘readability’, ‘compliance with brief’ and ‘lexis’ may allow for personal preference in terms of register and choice of lexis.

The other categories of reasons included different tutors giving different marks. Three students commented that there was a discrepancy between tutors on the same module feeling that this resulted in very different marks. Two students raised the issue of students who are native speakers of the source language having a clearer understanding of the grammar and lexis than the tutors, but that the tutors were not ‘listening’ and merely ‘agreeing to differ’. In classes where native and non-native speakers of the target text language submit coursework together, one student indicated that the tutors ‘preferred’ the target text produced by native speakers. In cases where native and non-native speakers are in the same class and submitting the same coursework, there are two different marking criteria to account for the distinction in main language or second language translation, but from the student’s comment it is clear that there is some concern that this differentiation is not taking place in practice.

A quarter of the reasons given for questioning the objectivity of the assessment relate to anonymity of marking. This was surprising to the authors who had initially only considered the issue of subjectivity in terms of applying criteria to texts rather than in terms of who is being marked. All coursework and exams are marked anonymously, but issues raised by the students show that they do not believe that the system is entirely anonymous. One student noted ‘I feel that sometimes names are not fully removed from the documents or Turnitin⁶ does not guarantee complete privacy and it does not help if you are identified as an English native speaker or someone with English as a second language.’ One student felt ‘I think over the course of a term lecturers get to know the style of their students and can probably guess sometimes who wrote which text, it could only be sort of objective if an independent third person marks and assesses the assignments’. These answers are revealing as they demonstrate that there is need for the systems used to guarantee anonymity to be clearly explained and that students have an opportunity to express their concerns and have them addressed.

The divergence in responses is revealing in terms of the lack of trust the students have in various aspects of the assessment process. These findings show that there is a need for the tutors to continue to build their shared understanding of professional judgements to ensure there is parity and transparency in the standards they apply. The tutors also need to be able to share their understanding of the nature of professional judgement so that students are assured that it is more than mere individual preference. These discussions would contribute to an increase in levels of assessment literacy, as would more discussion on the criteria that the students are assessed by. This process has been started but as Elkington points out ‘Like other literacies assessment literacy is slowly learned and never complete’ (2016, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

The widespread introduction of translator competence models in translator education demonstrates that, as a discipline, translation has engaged in debates about the most effective forms of training, which includes debates on assessing. This is also testified by the wide range of research on assessing translator competence. The case study presented here reveals that this discipline-wide debate is also informing both tutors’ assessment practices and students’ evaluation of these practices. In their responses to questions on assessment, the tutors and students showed they generally had a clear understanding of translator competence models and their responses echoed the debates on the appropriateness of assessing certain

competences, product or process, the validity of a final exam and other assessment tasks, and how objective marking can be.

As a discipline, translation has always had a clear understanding of the links between university education and the professional translation industry. This understanding has meant that assessment practices have been linked to real-world practices thus ensuring that assessment reflects the demands of the professional contexts. Translator educators within universities and the translation profession have debated for some time the skills that need to be developed and assessed. This means that translation as a discipline has already implemented many aspects of the HEA tenets for good assessment practice. For example, translation training recognises that translator competence can only be achieved through practice, which means that formative assessment is integrated on to translation modules, thus ensuring that summative assessment is preceded by formative assessment. Given the clear LOs of modules using translator competence as their theoretical underpinning, the assessment and LOs can be clearly aligned. In terms of the first two assessment tenets i.e. ‘promoting assessment for learning’ and ‘developing assessment fit for purpose’ the authors’ concur with Kelly that ‘[w]e are, then, in an ideal position to become involved in more general movements towards the renovation and innovation of university education in general; (...) and it is surely our responsibility as trainers to share our experience’ (Kelly, 2007, p. 130).

However, the authors’ research has revealed concern about current assessment practices amongst both tutors and students. It has also revealed differences in levels of satisfaction with and trust of the assessment instruments. These findings show that there are areas where the HEA tenets could be more fully employed to create assessment practices which both tutors and students feel are valid and reliable. The most important area to address is ‘integrating assessment literacy into the course design’ and by doing this the other tenets such as ‘constructing standards in communities’, ‘recognising that assessment lacks precision’ and ‘ensuring the reliability of professional standards’ will also become embedded in assessment practice. The work carried out with the tutors, using the results of the tutor survey, discussing the assessment practices and criteria and making adjustments to the assessment weighting and the criteria is an important step in developing assessment literacy among the staff and constructing standards in communities. Consulting students’ perspective about these refinements can also be seen as a way of incorporating these two tenets.

Given the relatively small sample size we cannot generalise these results to larger populations. However, the results can indicate potential trends that may contribute to and/or inform the practice of assessment in translator education and future research on theoretical discussions and follow-up empirical studies. The case study may be considered an informed suggestion for best practice in translator education, i.e. assessment literacy can be integrated more effectively into course design to improve assessment practice by addressing this aspect more explicitly and constructing assessment standards in communities.

Using the HEA tenets as a lens to investigate the assessment practices on translation modules suggests avenues for further research and development of assessment. The first is to explore the ways in which academics and ‘professional communities set up opportunities and processes’ (HEA, 2012, p. 21) to facilitate the development of professional judgement. Secondly, the authors would like to explore the ways in which assessment literacy would facilitate not only ‘the immediate needs of certification or feedback to students on their current learning, but also contribute in some way to their prospective learning’ (Boud & Falchikov, 2006, p. 400; Boud & Molloy, 2013). The authors believe that students who have a greater assessment literacy and fully understand the criteria and processes involved in assessing translation will be better equipped to apply this knowledge to translations that they or others have com-

pleted. Therefore, developing assessment literacy within translator education can provide the students with the skills necessary for their continuing professional development (CPD), and this knowledge of assessment literacy could also be applied to assessment practices outside the university and provide the knowledge base for mentoring or CPD courses for those already translating professionally.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The terms ‘teacher’ and ‘trainer’ have only been used when they are part of an original quotation. In all other instances the authors have used the term ‘tutor’ to emphasise the teaching role, and ‘educator’ to stress the pedagogical role of tutors.
- ² PACTE’s research project on ‘Establishing Competence Levels in the Acquisition of Translation Competence in Written Translation (NACT)’ is currently developing a proposal of competence descriptors by level.
- ³ Strategic competence (i.e. organisational and planning skills, problem identification and problem-solving, monitoring, self-assessment and revision) (Kelly, 2005: 33).
- ⁴ While Table 1 displays eight competences, there are only seven positions in the ranking since tutors rated both ‘Information mining’ and ‘Strategic competence’ as third in order of importance, and students rated both ‘Information mining’ and ‘Thematic competence’ in the same position (i.e. 4th).
- ⁵ Despite some occasional language issues, the authors have decided to present students’ quotes as originally written by them.
- ⁶ A working platform for submission of coursework where tutors can provide students with personalised feedback and assess their progress throughout the course.