

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.

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