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Current trends on MA translation courses in the UK: changing assessment practices on core translation modules

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Assessment underpins all forms of translator training and is an essential element of any teaching and learning process. By looking at university assessment practices, we can gain an insight into current understandings about the nature of translation practice and what issues are foregrounded in translator education. This paper presents the findings of the second stage of our research into assessment practices on core translation modules of MA Translation courses offered in the UK, and follows on from a preliminary case study conducted at the University of Westminster in 2015 and 2016 with MA Translation tutors and students (n=16; n=53). The research presented in this paper was carried out via documentary research into all universities offering MA Translation courses (n=27) and via a survey which asked a representative of each UK university to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 55% of universities (n=15). The areas explored include universities' learning outcomes, assessment instruments and criteria. In the light of the data gathered, our study aims to discover if and to what extent current assessment practices on the core translation modules reflect the competence-based understandings of the translation process and have adopted new forms of assessment.

Keywords: assessment practices, MA Translation, survey, tenets of assessment, translator competence, translator education.

1. Introduction

The issue of assessment has been placed in a pivotal position in the debate on UK Higher Education (HE). The British Government published a White Paper setting out its vision for UK universities entitled *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2016). This framework will create many challenges for the universities, including that of attracting students. The Higher Education Academy (HEA), which defines itself on its website as 'the national body which champions teaching excellence' and provides accreditation of university teaching staff, has set out in a series of

documents the centrality of assessment practices. The HEA claims that effective assessment practices are essential to ensuring student engagement and student satisfaction and thereby ensuring the universities' continued existence. This point was emphasised by Elkington (2016, 2) when he stated that 'assessment of student learning is a fundamental function of higher education' and students themselves place considerable importance on assessment since it 'tells students what is valued and what they need to achieve to be successful' (2). However, the student satisfaction rate for assessment and feedback according to the 2015-2016 National Student Survey results (HEFCE 2016) remains lower than other indicators such as teaching quality, showing that assessment continues to be an area which universities need to address.

Our paper explores the assessment practices on core translation modules on MAs in Translation in the context of the UK wide debate on assessment in universities and in particular with reference to the paper, *A Marked Improvement: Transforming Assessment* (HEA 2012). In this paper, the HEA sets out six tenets of assessment which are: 1. Promoting assessment for learning, 2. Developing assessment fit for purpose, 3. Recognising that assessment lacks precision, 4. Constructing standards in communities, 5. Integrating assessment literacy into course design, and 6. Ensuring professional judgements are reliable.

In setting out the tenet 'fit for purpose', the HEA paper (2012, 19) states that assessment systems 'should focus on the demonstration of the development and achievement of intended programme outcomes'. However, there are more precise definitions of fit for purpose such as the one offered by the staff development information published by Teesside University (2017) which states that fit for purpose includes the following five attributes – validity, reliability, transparency, authenticity and manageability. It is these attributes that our survey analyses, particularly in light of the HEA's assertion that 'there needs to be a recognition of the difficulties inherent in marking systems, and the imbalance between validity and reliability needs to also be addressed through increased emphasis on validity' (2012, 19).

This paper is organised into a further four sections. Section 2 provides an overview of the notion of assessment in translator education, including its purpose and function. Section 3 focuses on competence-based learning and translator competence

assessment. Section 4 presents a comparative case study on assessment practices on the core translation modules of MA and MSc in Translation/MA Translation and Interpreting courses offered in the UK (n=27). In this section, we also discuss and analyse the main findings of our comparative study, with an emphasis on universities' learning outcomes (LOs), their assessment instruments and tasks and their assessment criteria. Finally, section 5 outlines the main conclusions drawn from our study and suggests some future lines of research and applications.

2. Assessment in translator education: purpose and function

In any educational setting, some form of assessment is an essential corollary to teaching and, as we have highlighted in the introduction, at present the UK HE institutions are beginning to recognise that the assessment practices they have engaged in often do not meet the tenets the HEA sets out. However, translation courses at universities have perhaps already started to question their assessment practices, since these are intimately tied up with professional issues of translation quality assessment and the debates on whether university assessment criteria align with those used in professional translation service providers.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that translations are constantly being assessed in a variety of contexts, ensuring the validity and reliability of assessment criteria remains problematic (Williams 2009, 5). It is interesting to note that this consideration chimes with the HEA assessment tenets that there needs to be a recognition that validity and reliability are not easily achieved in assessment. Assessment is inextricably linked to LOs and, in an activity as complex and multi-dimensional as translation, it is very difficult to explicitly state the outcomes. Translation assessment is also a complex matter as it involves judgements about what it is considered to be “good” and “bad”, together with the subjective nature of this practice (i.e. these judgements are not completely or even mainly objective). Therefore, some translation scholars (Martínez Melis and Hurtado Albir 2001, 272-273; González Davies 2004, 31) call for further rigorous research in assessment in translator training and for the introduction of more objective assessment criteria.

Assessment serves a variety of functions. In the context of translator training at university, evaluation of translations can be looked at from the perspective of the product (normally associated with summative assessment) or the process (normally linked to formative assessment). Based on its function, Martínez Melis and Hurtado Albir (2001, 277) distinguish three purposes of assessment: 1) a diagnostic function, which identifies students' abilities and shortcomings in the group being assessed; 2) a summative function, whose objective is to judge the end results and the knowledge acquired by the students at the end of the learning process; 3) a formative function, which is integrated in the learning process and is primarily used for the student to become actively involved in enhancing his own learning process. The second and third functions also align with the HEAs distinction between 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning' (HEA 2012). The HEA's assessment framework emphasises 'assessment for learning'. We believe that summative assessment in the terms we are investigating i.e. any assessment whose marks will contribute to the students' final grade on the module will often have a double purpose i.e. to inform and advise students about their performance at each stage (pedagogical assessment) and to prepare them to meet the professional translator standards (professional assessment) (González Davies 2004, 31).

Traditionally, the summative product assessment has been prioritised in translator education with many courses solely assessing the students by means of the translations they produce either as coursework or in a final exam. The last two decades in particular, however, have seen a proliferation in research papers advocating new assessment instruments in many European countries. These include: diagnostic questionnaires, questionnaires on translation problems or translation knowledge, reflective diaries, translation commentaries on tasks performed (a translation, a discussion, a group activity, etc.), translation process recordings of students or professionals while they are translating, peer and self-assessment and students' learning portfolios (González Davies 2004; Kelly 2005; Hurtado Albir 2007, 2015a, 2015b; Way 2008, 2009, 2014; Galán-Mañas and Hurtado Albir 2015). Our research attempts to discover how much these debates on assessment and the new forms of assessment are actually implemented in UK universities offering MA Translation courses.

3. Assessing translator competence

Weinert (2001) defines the concept of competence as ‘a roughly specialised system of abilities, proficiencies or skills that are sufficient to reach a specific goal’ (45).

Translation can be understood as a complex process which requires a competence in Weinert’s sense made up of a set of skills or sub-competences. Trying to break down this competence into several interrelated areas of competence has been the work of many scholars since the 1970s, and attempts to identify and categorise such areas have led to a wide range of conceptual approaches to translator competence. However, there seems to be a degree of agreement as to the main skills or areas of competence, with some of the most influential proposals in advancing translator competence being developed in the last two decades (e.g. Kelly 2002, 2005, 2007; PACTE 2003, 2005; EMT 2009).

Since the aim of translation courses is to provide a solid foundation for students to become competent translators and since a competent translator can be defined in terms of a set of competences they have acquired, the LOs of the modules should reflect the competences that universities perceive as core to competent translators. By making translator competence the conceptual framework for training, there has also been a shift from the focus on the ‘product’ of translation to the ‘process’ of translation, which has influenced the way translator educators perceive the role and function of assessment. There has indeed been a shift in translator training courses, especially in Spain, which has been at the forefront of research into and application of translator competence. This use of translator competence as the basis for designing MA Translation courses was also the conceptual underpinning of the launch of the European Masters in Translation (EMT) which was set up to provide a standardisation of translator training in the universities in the EU. According to the EMT expert group, in 2006, there were 285 universities offering MAs in Translation across Europe (EMT 2009) and, in 2014, 114 universities applied to join the EMT (European Commission 2014). These figures show that universities are adopting competence-based models.

Despite the spread of competence-based training in HE institutions, there has been little research into the evaluation of the acquisition of translator competence and how students’ performance is assessed. As Galán-Mañas and Hurtado Albir (2015, 6) have pointed out, many of the existing competence-based models have not fully operationalised the sub-competences involved (i.e. neither the indicators for having

acquired the competence, nor the performance levels are clearly set out), thus making it difficult to assess effectively.

Of the existing research into the evaluation of translator competence, the following studies deserve special attention. Schäffner and Adab (2000), devoted an entire section of their edited volume *Developing Translation Competence* to translator competence assessment. Beeby (2000, 185-198) presents an empirical study contrasting the results of summative and diagnostic evaluation into non-mother tongue. The study found that using a traditional examination allowed for very limited assessment and that a variety of innovative assessment methods should be employed in order to make the evaluation more complete, effective and balanced (196). Focusing on the evaluation of the product, Adab (2000, 215-228) suggests a framework for summative assessment. The author's proposal is grounded on explicit categories and weighting criteria that measure students' ability to transfer a message from the source text to the target text. McAlester's (2000, 229-243) focal point is assessment in translation into a foreign language and the need for a standard criterion-referenced assessment framework for evaluating translation adequacy.

The last few years have seen the emergence of proposals to assess translation processes formatively. For instance, Way (2008) suggests a systematic assessment of students' competence that promotes self-assessment and self-criticism not only throughout their translator training at university but also during their professional careers. Way (2009) later presents a Project Management Sheet that allows students to identify, analyse and classify problems, find effective tools to solve them, and evaluate the reliability of such resources. Gaballo (2009, 58) proposes a systemic-functional model of translator competence that can also be used as a tool to assess, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the translation process and the acquisition of translator competence. Garant (2009) carried out a case study for holistic translation assessment that suggests holistic grading systems are seen as more related to training trainee translators for real world tasks while points-based grading systems (i.e. points-based error methods) tend to be seen as suspect.

The last five years have been particularly prolific regarding translator competence assessment. Massey and Ehrensberger-Dow's work (2012, 2013) focuses

on assessment methods that explore translation processes in laboratory-based and workplace research projects to complement traditional product assessment. Way (2014), suggests a decision-making framework for legal translation that aims to enhance students' confidence and performance in this field. The structure for this framework includes assessment using the Project Management Sheet (Way 2009). Galán-Mañas and Hurtado Albir (2015) present some assessment procedures, instruments and tasks for translator training, and recent research on assessment practices also includes some case studies on summative assessment in translator education, both at BA (Pavani 2016) and MA level (Huertas Barros and Vine 2016).

What these research studies show is that translator education and translator educators have already begun to consider many of the issues which the HEA's paper *A Marked Improvement: Transforming Assessment* (HEA 2012) set out as UK sector wide goals for new assessment practices. What we hope to discover in this research is to what extent the concepts of competence-based training and assessment have become embedded within the MA and MSc in Translation / MA Translation and Interpreting courses offered in the UK and whether they correspond to the HEAs assessment tenets.

4. A comparative study of assessment practices in UK universities offering MA translation and interpreting courses

In this section, we present the findings of a comparative case study of assessment practices on the core translation modules of MA and MSc in Translation / MA Translation and Interpreting courses in UK universities. This is the second stage of a wider research project into assessment practices and follows on from a preliminary case study conducted at the University of Westminster in 2015 and 2016 with MA Translation tutors and students (n=16 and n=53 respectively) (Huertas Barros and Vine 2016, 2018).

Our research identified 27 universities (see section 4.2 on research methodology) offering MAs and MScs in Translation / MA Translation and Interpreting. The courses have a range of foci which are reflected in the course names with some universities offering MAs which specify 'professional', 'specialised', or 'in European contexts'. All the universities offer a one-year course which can be taken part-

time over two years. All MAs consist of mandatory core modules which in most cases comprise the language pair specific translation module and also a translation theory module. Where the translation is not core but optional, the options are the different language pairs and taking one of the options is mandatory. The theory modules vary in the degree to which they are applied i.e. if the focus is on textual analysis or introducing contemporary theoretical debates. Most courses offer a module or final project which is an extended translation with a commentary. The distribution of teaching of IT and Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) technologies is interesting. Of the 27 universities, eight make explicit reference to teaching IT and CAT technologies within the core module, ten others provide a core module dealing with translation technology and of the remaining nine universities, five offer an optional module. Other core modules include additional translation modules usually in a specialist area and research skills. There are a wide variety of option modules. The most popular being translation as a profession, subtitling and audiovisual translation, additional languages, intercultural communication, localisation and a variety of specialised translation modules.

4.1. Rationale for using core translation modules as the object of comparison

When attempting to compare translation courses, we were aware that the different courses had very different foci and different structures, and these structures contained so many variables that a meaningful comparison of the entire course was not possible within the remit of our research. We decided to study the core translation modules since this was the module shared across all the courses. We are aware that there are many pressures on course and module design (Toohey 2002), however we concur with Eisner (1994, cited in Toohey 2002, 45) who contends that what is made core becomes ‘the focus of more attention’ and ‘student performance on those core subjects will be carefully scrutinised and rigorously assessed.’ As Toohey states, when a decision is made to add the content to a core module it signals ‘what content is essential and what is desirable’ (45). But often the choice is not ‘made strictly on the basis of relevance (...) but on the faculty’s beliefs about what is appropriate and its level of comfort with the decision.’ (45). Therefore, we believe that what is included or excluded from the core modules is more significant than merely being a case of institutional pressure.

The areas explored in these core modules include the LOs, the assessment instruments and tasks, and the assessment criteria. We have focused on assessed coursework i.e. those tasks whose marks contribute to the students' final grade for the module. The assessments are summative in that they contribute to the final assessment of whether a student has achieved the LOs. However, in many cases these assessments also have a formative function i.e. when the grade for the module is arrived at by combining marks from several pieces of coursework given at various stages during the module or when coursework is weighted progressively. Of the universities which we had specific information on coursework (24 out of 27), 50% of them explicitly stated they assessed two or more translations. In these cases, the feedback will have a formative function. We chose these pieces of assessment because they were more formalised. They are recorded in module outlines, are not susceptible to individual tutors' preferences and remain constant across all language pairs. These are the pieces of coursework where marking criteria and marking practices are standardised. Another consideration is that summative assessment should assess all the LOs of the module. However, formative assessments may only focus on a particular LO and therefore are not a guide to how assessments respond to LOs. As Elkington (2016, 2) says of assessed coursework, it 'tells students what is valued and what they need to achieve' and therefore can also tell researchers about the values and beliefs underpinning the core modules.

4.2. Empirical case study: research methodology

Our research is grounded on the methodological proposals suggested by Saldanha and O'Brien (2013), which have successfully been applied to empirical studies on translator education (e.g. Huertas Barros 2013, Huertas Barros and Buendía Castro 2018).

Following some preliminary research in UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) and further online research, we identified a total of 27 universities offering MA or MSc in Translation / MA in Translation and Interpreting in the UK. Where universities offered a variety of translation-related courses, we chose the courses on practical translation, specialised translation or translation for professional purposes, rather than the more theoretical courses which do not offer a core translation module. While we initially identified 29 universities, we decided to exclude two universities from the final list. This was based on the fact that although one university offered an

MRes in Translation Studies and the other offered an MA which combined Translation with other discipline (i.e. Transcultural Studies or TESOL), neither of these offered core translation modules.

Our case study was conducted during the academic year 2015-2016 by asking a representative of each university to fill out a questionnaire via GoogleForms. Using our existing networks of MA Translation courses, we identified a contact from each university (the course leader or course director in most cases) and sent them an informative email about our research study. We asked them to complete the questionnaire in their role as representative of their course rather than as an individual. In the cases where the specific representative was not involved in the teaching of the core translation modules, we asked them to delegate to someone who was able to represent their translation courses within their department. The questionnaire was completed by 15 representatives, which accounts for more than 55% of the UK universities offering MA or MSc Translation / MA Translation and Interpreting courses.

The questionnaire contained four sections. Section A included some general details of the courses; section B focused on the LOs of the core translation modules; section C covered the assessment instruments and tasks used, and section D focused on the assessment criteria. The questionnaire mainly asked closed questions, but there were also some open questions that allowed the respondents to provide more detailed answers. The areas explored included, among others, specific questions about the LOs of the core translation modules (e.g. whether they had changed over the last 5 years), the weighting attached to each assessment instrument and/or task, whether the assessment practices had changed in the last 5 years (2011-2016) and the rationale behind such change(s), whether there was a grading scale or a numerical value assigned to each type of error, or whether assessment criteria had been modified during this period (2011-2016).

The data obtained through the survey was complemented with the examination of documentation available in the public domain, including module proformas, course units and handbooks. We compiled a master document with information on the 27 universities. In most cases, the information available online included a brief description

of the module, the associated LOs, the form of delivery, the assessment pattern and, occasionally, the syllabus content. As shall be seen in section 4.3, this data enriched the findings of the survey, particularly in relation to the LOs of core translation modules, which was a question with a low response rate. This research methodology allowed us to collect detailed information about the LOs of core translation modules and a breakdown of the coursework used by most universities (i.e. 23 out of 27 and 24 out of 27 universities respectively).

4.3. Analysis and discussion of the findings of the comparative case study

4.3.1. Background information about the MA and MSc in Translation / MA translation and interpreting courses

As mentioned in the previous section, the questionnaire was completed by 15 representatives (i.e. 55% response rate) of the universities offering MA and MSc in Translation / MA Translation and Interpreting courses in the UK. In most cases, the questionnaire was completed by either the Course Leader (33.3%) or by a Lecturer (33.3%) involved in the delivery of the core translation modules. In some cases the participants were Senior Lecturers (26.7%) or Professors (6.7%). Sixty percent of respondents had been working on the core translation modules of MA Translation programmes for more than 6 years, with the remaining 40% having been part of the teaching team for between 2 and 5 years. The results show that, in the majority of cases, the staff teaching on the core translation modules combine their teaching with freelancing work. In 40% of the universities surveyed, the percentage of staff who are also freelance translators ranges between 26-50%. In 33.3% of cases, more than 50% of staff are also freelancers and in 26.7% of universities less than 25% of their staff combine their teaching with commercial translation. Based on the information provided by respondents, 60% of the universities surveyed do not provide in-house staff development workshops on current issues in translator education. Forty percent of universities offer such training, which mainly consists of sessions on assessment and feedback (including harmonising teaching and marking), curriculum design, text sourcing, use of computer-assisted translation tools, use of corpora for translation purposes, or the integration of theory and practice in translation commentaries.

4.3.2. Learning outcomes on the core translation modules of the MA and MSc in translation / MA translation and interpreting courses

Participants were asked to list the LOs of the core translation modules taken by all translation students in a specific language pair. This question had a relative low response rate in comparison with other questions, with only nine participants responding (60% response rate). However, we were able to supplement the data gathered from the survey with documentary research of module information available online, and we were able to gather information on the LOs of a further 14 universities. Therefore, by combining the results of the survey and the documentary research, we gathered data on LOs of 23 universities (out of a total of 27), which accounts for 85% of the UK universities offering MA Translation and/or MA Translation and Interpreting.

A total of 148 LOs were retrieved from both the survey and the module documentation available in the public domain. We matched the LOs to the EMT model of translator competence to give us data on what translator competences were the focus of the core translation modules. The EMT model (2009) was visualised as a diagram of six competence areas forming a wheel around a central hub. The five outer competences areas are language, intercultural, information mining, technological, thematic and the sixth competence area forming the hub is the translation service provision. The 2009 document then divides two of these competence areas, the intercultural and the translation service provision, into dimensions. All the areas and dimensions are then further divided into components which we have referred to in this paper as sub-competences or areas of competence. It is this list of 48 sub-competences we used as a guide. We matched the wording of the LOs to those of the sub-competences and were able to align them to one of the six competences areas and/or dimensions. Since several of the LOs explicitly mentioned theoretical aspects (12.0%), we have adapted the EMT model by adding in a competence relating to a knowledge and critical understanding of translation theory (i.e. theoretical underpinning). We felt that rather than align theory LOs to other competences, the explicit mention of theory reflects the fact that the universities themselves are providing theoretical underpinning and that they are training students not only as translators but also as members of academic communities.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the vast majority of those LOs (82.7%) refer to the ‘Translation Service Provision Competence: Product dimension’ of the EMT competence model. Given the central position of this dimension as the interconnecting hub for the other competence area, it is not surprising that this competence should be so prominent. Moreover, since this competence includes the sub-competences of ‘creating and submitting a translation appropriate to the client’s request’ this finding is not unexpected. However, 20% of universities had a LO which could be related to ‘Translation Service Provision Competence: Interpersonal dimension’ (e.g. team organisation, critical understanding of the needs of the client, working with other experts/agents involved in the translation process, including the client, etc.). This dimension of the translation service provision, as its name suggests, requires the student to demonstrate how they have interacted with others, but when the information on coursework is analysed (see section 4.3.3), only four of the 24 universities mentioned the use of group work in the assessment and only one explicitly mentioned that assessment was on a simulated professional translation task. Therefore, it is surprising that this competence is so prominent in the LOs.

Over a third of respondents (36.5%) referred to LOs which could be aligned to ‘Intercultural Competence’. This competence includes sub-competences such as ‘producing a register appropriate to a given situation’ (EMT 2009) and ‘composing the document in accordance with the conventions of the genre and rhetorical standards’ (EMT 2009), therefore it is perhaps striking that this dimension was not more fully reflected in the LOs. However, it may be that the sub-competence mentioned under product dimension (see ‘Translation Service Provision Competence: Product dimension’ above) is considered to have sufficient overlap with these textual and sociolinguistic issues that respondents do not feel a need to address them separately.

‘Language competence’ was referred to in 10.8% of the LOs, which probably reflects the fact that universities use admissions criteria which ensure that students already have an acceptable standard of language competence and thus is not a LO for the course or modules. Of the 148 LOs analysed, 23% explicitly refer to information mining and research methodology (i.e. ‘Information Mining Competence’). This provides evidence that developing skills such as effective documentary and terminological research, knowing how to evaluate the reliability of sources and knowing how to use research tools effectively are becoming increasingly important and are seen

by universities as core skills for translators. A considerable number of documentary sources, tools and search engines are electronic resources (e.g. electronic dictionaries, electronic corpora, terminology software, etc.),¹ which may explain why eight out of the 27 universities have embedded technological aspects (including IT and CAT technologies) within the core translation modules.

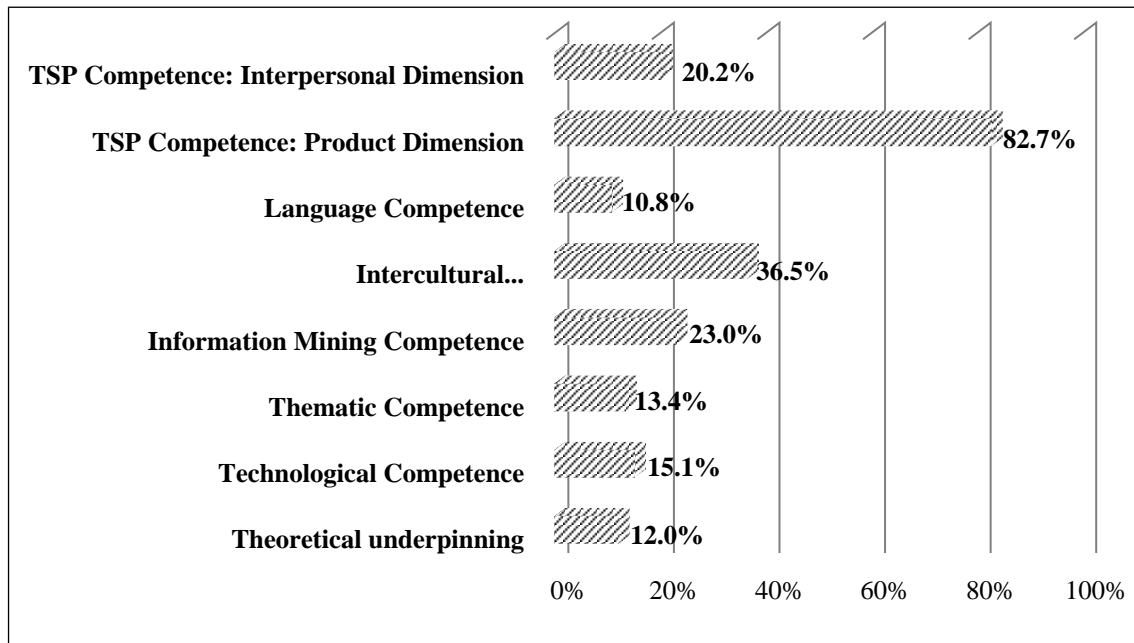


Figure 1. Breakdown of translator competences addressed by the LOs of the core translation modules.

According to respondents, 53.3% of universities have changed their LOs in the last 5 years (2011-2016), 33.3% have not done so and in 13.3% of cases the representative who completed the questionnaire was unsure. As shown in Figure 2, the main reasons behind a modification of the LOs of the core translation modules are changes in the professional requirements of the market and changes in pedagogical understanding of translator training. To a lesser extent, the rationale behind changes in the LOs was changes in beliefs about the efficacy of previous assessment criteria or changes in the software available at the university.

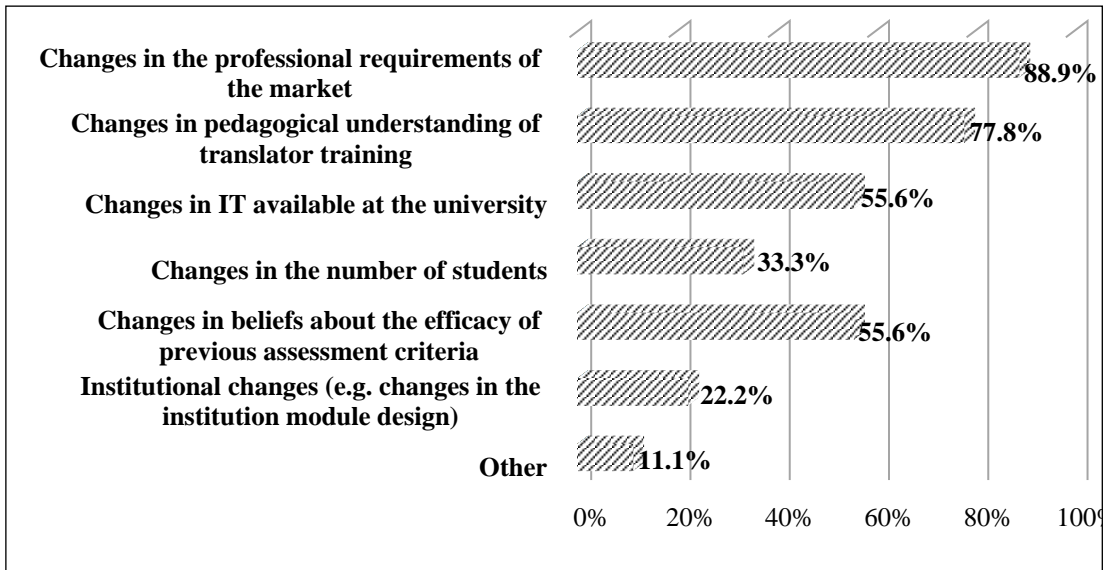


Figure 2. Breakdown of the reasons why the LOs of core translation modules have been modified².

4.3.3. *Assessment instruments and tasks on the core translation modules of the MA and MSc in translation / MA translation and interpreting courses*

As regards summative assessment on the core translation modules, we collected information of 24 (out of 27) universities (+ 88% of UK universities). The data collected via the survey and the documentation on the public domain show that exams and coursework in combination are the most widely used assessment instruments (58.3%), followed by coursework only (37.5%) and by exams only (4.1%) (see Figure 3).

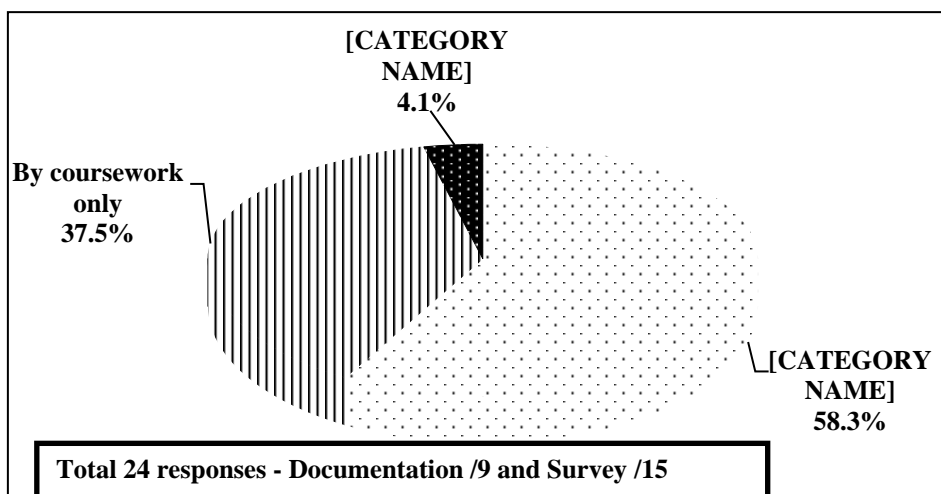


Figure 3. Breakdown of summative assessment on the core translation modules.

The assessed coursework can be categorised into three groups: translation only, translation and a commentary, translations with or without a commentary but including other forms of assessment. Of the 23 out of the 24 universities that assessed using coursework (only one university assessed purely via an exam), eight universities used only translation, seven universities used a combination of translation and a commentary and eight others used either of these instruments and included other forms of assessment. While ‘traditional’ translation coursework is still the predominant form of assessment used on the core translation modules, our data show the emergence of new forms of assessment which explicitly ask for other tasks. These include glossaries, termbases, translation memories, reports on pre-translation research, communication with clients, group work presentations, translation commentaries, translation essays, recordings and translation methodology assignments. Such process-oriented forms of assessment promote analytical thinking to justify translation decisions and enhance students’ learning by making them more aware of the processes involved in translation. This emergence of new forms of assessing also shows that translation courses have already begun to implement the types of changes recommended by the HEA which states: ‘Our approach would see assessment methods diversified to improve their validity, authenticity and inclusivity, making them clearly relevant and worthwhile in the eyes of students.’ (HEA 2012, 17).

Our data also show variations in terms of the number of pieces of summative assessment set by each university, the length of the translation and/or commentaries, and the percentage allocated to each piece. Despite the fact that the translation modules have a different credit framework (i.e. 15, 20 or 30 credits) and length (1 semester-long vs. year-long), the data still reveal commonalities while factoring in these differences. When exams are used as part of the assessment, the weighting attached to them ranges between 40-60% of the overall mark to this component, with only two universities having a higher weighting (i.e. one at 75% and the other at 100%). In most cases, they are 2- or 3-hour PC-based open book exams, with a word count ranging between 600-650/750 words. In the cases when the time allocated to the exam is shorter (i.e. 2-hour exam) or longer (i.e. 6-hour exam) the word count is proportionally equivalent (i.e. 400 words and 1,500 words respectively).

Likewise, the coursework component normally accounts for 40-60% of the overall module mark, although in some cases the coursework comprises several pieces which are worth between 15%-25%. As expected, year-long translation modules tend to be more heavily assessed, with 5-6 pieces of summative assessment. However, there is a considerable variation in the number of pieces of assessed work in one semester-long modules, with an equal number of universities setting 2-3 elements of summative assessment and 4-5 pieces. In the cases when the coursework involves 'translation only', the length varies between 350-1000 words but, overall, the translation coursework rarely surpasses 2500 words. The translation with commentary generally consists of 1000-2000 words, although occasionally it is longer (e.g. 4000-word translation report or 7000-word portfolio of translations and a commentary).

In most cases (80%), the main assumption underpinning the choice of assessment instruments and tasks is that the use of a wide range of assessment tasks within a module provides a good basis for monitoring students' progress. According to 53.3% of respondents, the translation product (i.e. coursework and exams) is a relatively accurate reflection of whether students have acquired the necessary skills. As regards these two types of assessment, 40% of participants believe exam conditions (mainly time constraints which do not allow much time to conduct thorough preliminary research or revision) are not representative of the conditions under which professional translators normally translate whereas coursework is. See figure 4 for a detailed breakdown.

Another attribute for deciding if assessments are fit for purpose in the HEA paper (2012) was to recognise the tension that exists between ensuring both validity and reliability. Here validity is the measure to which both students and staff recognise that the assessment is a valid reflection of the task. Ensuring that an assessment is valid requires collaboration and dialogue between students and tutors. Reliability is a measure of how much the results can be relied on. The HEA suggests that programmes should not prioritise reliability over validity. As can be seen in Figure 4, twice as many respondents (i.e. 40%) do not see exams as valid in terms of reflecting the real-life practice, where coursework is. And 20% feel the reliability of exams was a reason for using this assessment method. These findings may then be interpreted from the HEA tenets perspective as showing that exams are now questioned for both their validity and reliability. An alternative analysis of the data on coursework and exams is that the use

of both methods reflects the tension between the need for validity and reliability in that the exams are intended to ensure reliability and the coursework translation ensures validity.

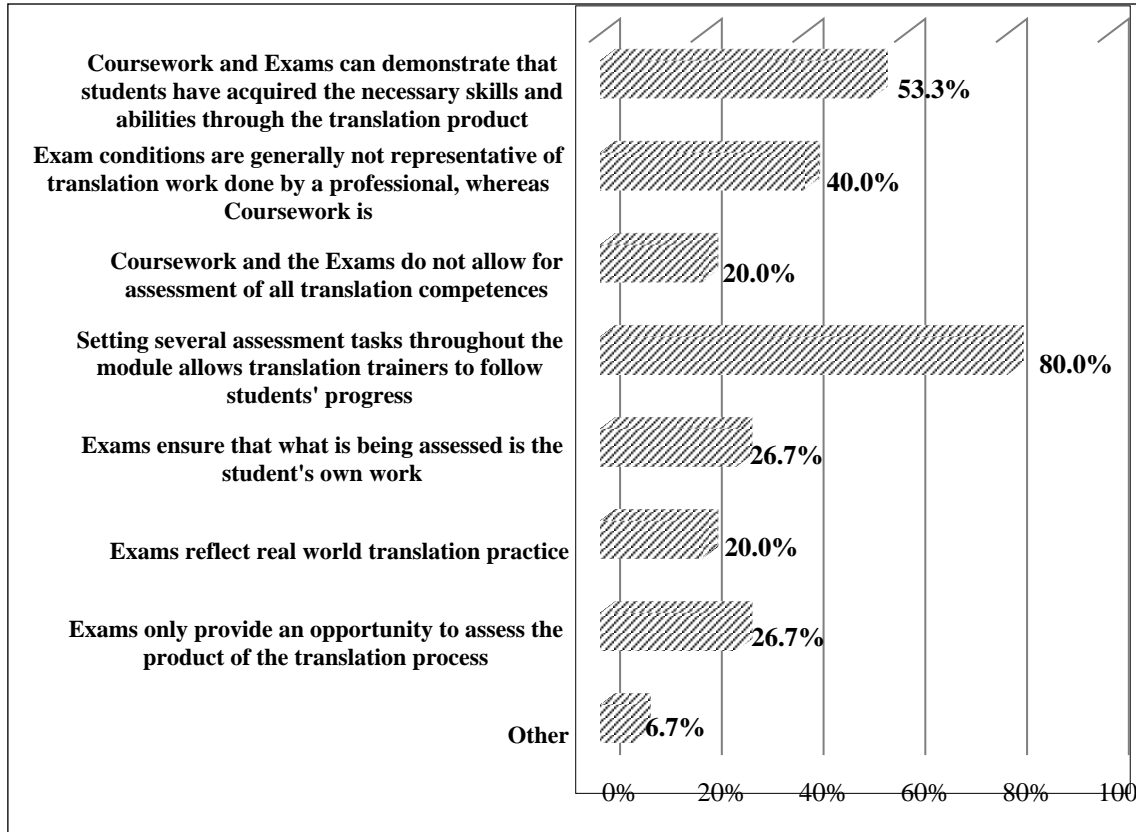


Figure 4. Assumptions underpinning the choice of assessment instruments and tasks.

The survey results also revealed that two thirds of the universities (66.7%) have changed their assessment practices on the core translation modules within the last five years (2011-2016). These changes mainly included variations in the methods or number of instruments used to assess students' performance but also changes in the weighting associated with each instrument or task. Changes in the number of instruments normally involved a reduction for operational reasons or to respond to student feedback on over assessment. A trend towards reducing the number of assessments could be seen as translation courses being proactive in improving assessment practice. As we mentioned earlier, one of the definitions of 'fit for purpose' assessment is that the assessments are manageable. The HEA (2012) advances the idea of programme level assessment which would remove the present focus on every module providing summative assessment.

As regards changes in the weighting allocated to each instrument, some respondents reported a reduction in the weighting of the exam and a corresponding increase in the weighting of coursework to achieve more holistic assessment. Other changes involved the introduction of progressive weighting of coursework to take account of students' learning curve. In terms of changes in particular tasks, some representatives reported the elimination of the commentary and annotations in the final exam, a decision to replace a collaborative translation task by an individual translation due to student dissatisfaction or a decision to allow students to translate into their native language in the assessment even if this does not reflect the direction in which the module is taught. Other changes include a reconsideration of assessment criteria and making translation exams open-book.

Most universities (70%) attributed the changes in their assessment practices to changes in pedagogical understanding of translation education and, to a lesser extent (50%), to changes in the professional requirements of the market, changes in beliefs about the efficacy of assessment criteria used previously and institutional changes, including assessment policies and module design (see Figure 5). Changes in pedagogical understanding of translator training were informed by translator competence models (85.7%), student-centred learning models (57.1%) and awareness of different learning styles (28.6%). Despite 33.3% of universities not having implemented changes in their assessment practices for the core translation modules, 14.3% of these universities confirmed that changes were being considered.

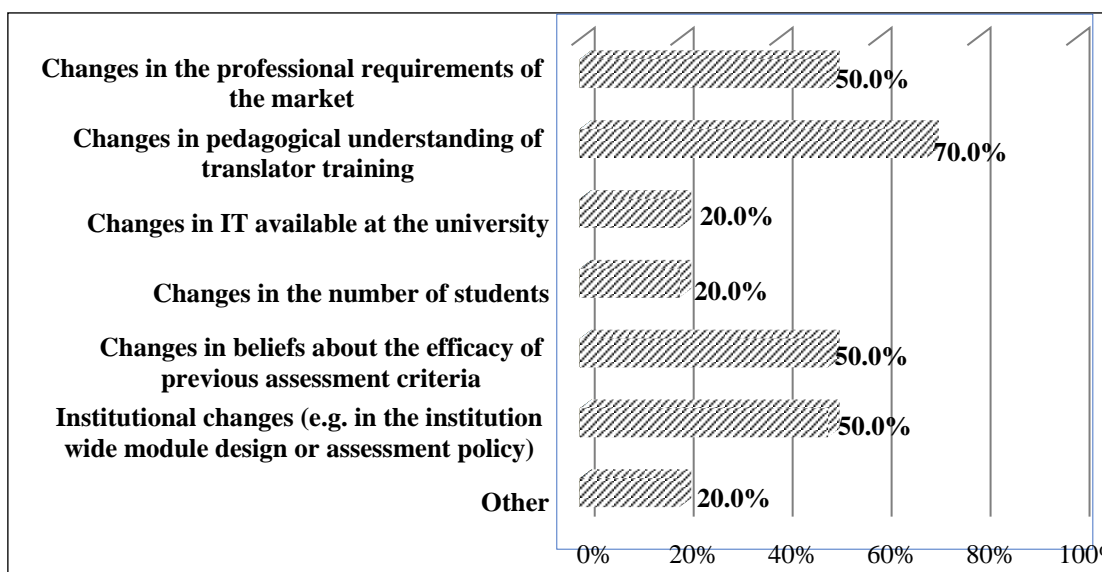


Figure 5. Rationale behind changes in assessment practices.

4.3.4. *Assessment criteria on the core translation modules of the MA and MSc in translation / MA translation and interpreting courses*

The survey results show that the most common assessment criteria used in summative assessment are: comprehension of and accuracy in rendering of the ST meaning (i.e. decoding); command of subject matter and mastery of technical terminology (including phraseology); production of an appropriate piece of discourse in the TL (i.e. encoding). This last criterion takes into account not only meaning but also register and style (i.e. overall readability of the translation, coherence and cohesion and stylistic effects, e.g. implied meaning and use of figurative language). It also includes accuracy of TL grammatical and syntax features, spelling and punctuation, as well as appropriate and accurate presentation (and deliverables) of text to professionally acceptable standards. The assessment criteria vary according to whether students are assessed in or out of their native tongue.

Some universities also take into consideration aspects such as: degree to which work is of a professional standard (usability) for a recently-qualified or junior translator; degree to which the translation is fit for the purpose (i.e. *skopos* specified in the translation brief, considering the readership, the text type/genre and the reason for the translation); (acceptability of) quality of the target text as perceived by/from the perspective of the target audience/client; use of TL conventions (numbers, dates, genre conventions, etc.); amount of revision required to reach a professional standard; degree of criticality of the error: critical, major and minor errors; implementation of relevant and successful translation techniques and strategies (skills of translation).

It emerged from the survey that only 6.6% of universities use a grading scale (i.e. a numerical value assigned to each of the errors) that is integrated in the marking sheet. One of the foci of the current debate on translation courses is whether or not the marking aligns to industry standards. Some argue that because universities do not apply the same 'rigorous' ('objective') marking methods as translation service providers do (i.e. they do not use detailed metrics which allocate a point value to error types and consider the final score as a quality assessment measure), that the marking in

universities is not accurate. The results of this question show that universities do not follow metrics and we can infer from this that universities do not feel that this marking is relevant to an academic setting. The reluctance to use marking metrics is in line with the HEA's tenet 3 'Recognising that assessment lacks precision' (2012, 20), which recommends that universities should acknowledge that it is not always possible to 'articulate explicitly' (20) all the standards and that 'there are important benefits of higher education which are not amenable either to the precise specification of standards or to objective assessment' (20). However recognising the lack of precision does not imply that assessments are unreliable, since the sixth tenet 'Ensuring professional judgements are reliable' recognises that academic judgement is a 'holistic judgement rather than [a] mechanistic process' (21) and suggests ways in which the professional judgements can be created in communities of practice. The discussion on objectivity below also bears out the fact that tutors teaching on translation courses recognise the principles underlying these tenets.

Our results show that 53.4% of universities have modified their assessment criteria in the last 5 years (2011-2016). These changes have been implemented in various ways. In some cases, universities have added, deleted or modified the wording of some of their assessment criteria, sometimes to mirror the criteria used by professional associations. Other changes involve a greater focus on the target audience and the client. A number of participants also report more explicit and detailed criteria regarding the different elements involved in a translation and a closer alignment between assessment criteria as well as translator competence models.

Once again, changes in universities' assessment criteria have mostly emerged as a result of changes in pedagogical understanding of translator training (85.7%) and, to a lesser degree, due to changes in beliefs about the efficacy of previous assessment criteria or tasks (28.6%) (see figure 6). Universities report that such changes have been influenced by recent research in translator training pedagogy, in particular, models of translator competence and general reading of academic papers on translator education.

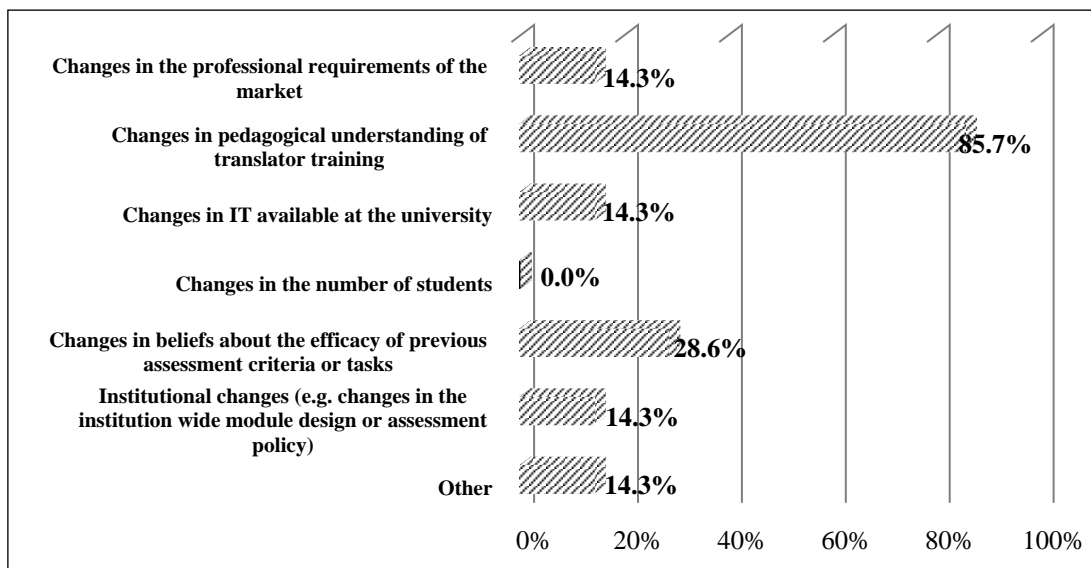


Figure 6. Rationale behind changes in assessment criteria.

More than three quarters of the universities (78.6%) feel their assessment criteria ensure objectivity to some extent, although some respondents acknowledge that the assessment of translation quality (particularly identifying errors and degree of severity) is inevitably a matter of judgement (Tenet 3 ‘Recognising that assessment lacks precision’ HEA 2012, 20). However, some participants feel that using all the same categories involves a certain degree of objectivity, and that a list of detailed criteria and a holistic competence approach ensure ‘transparency’ and a higher degree of objectivity. According to some respondents, grade descriptors based on the assessment criteria help to ensure consistency in marking across markers, and a list of comprehensive criteria provides meaningful feedback to students and is particularly helpful for borderline cases. Therefore, a structured and rigorous marking scheme contributes to ensure reliability by favouring fair and consistent marking (Tenet 6 ‘Ensuring that professional judgements are reliable’, HEA 2012, 21).

Although the responses to the question on objectivity showed that the underlying principles set out in the HEA tenets for assessment are already part of the understanding of assessment practices (i.e. the recognition of the lack of precision in assessment and creating contexts which ensure professional judgements are reliable), these principles were not explicitly or fully articulated. Moreover, only one of the respondents mentioned the student’s understanding of the criteria as an important aspect of ensuring objectivity. Ensuring that not only all the tutors on the core modules, but also the students understand the assessment criteria is key to ‘integrating assessment literacy into course design’

(Tenet 5, HEA 2012, 21). It is essential that students are aware of what elements are particularly important for a good translation and what distinguishes the different marking bands. Such understanding and awareness will help students 'to become autonomous learners who can readily reflect on and review their own progress, development and learning' (21). One of the respondents did highlight the importance of revising assessment criteria regularly to ensure they account for the needs of students, staff and the institution. We believe that 'Constructing standards in communities' (20), i.e. both staff and students, is essential to ensure an effective learning and assessment that includes the different perspectives of all the participants of the teaching and learning process.

5. Conclusions

Our initial research aim was to discover to what extent and in what ways translator competence models have become embedded in the core translation modules of MAs in Translation in the UK. We also used the HEA assessment tenets as a framework to evaluate their assessment practices. By doing this we have been able to look not only at assessment practices across the translation sector in UK universities, but we have also been able to compare these practices with underlying principles for assessment in the HE sector set out in the HEA's paper 'A Marked Improvement' (2012). We have discovered that there has indeed been a change in both the pedagogical beliefs and assumptions and in the assessment practices on these core modules which demonstrates that translator competence models have become widely adopted. We found evidence for this in the changes in assessment instruments and tasks and also in the respondents' reported reasons for the changes. The documented changes to LOs and assessment instruments demonstrate a gradual shift from a focus on the product to a focus on the processes involved in translation. What we also discovered from the analysis of the research data is that the ways in which assessment practice has changed on translation modules are also the ways in which assessment practices on these core modules are becoming more closely aligned to the tenets set out in the HEA's paper (2012). This is exemplified in the changes in assessment practices aiming to more fully reflect the translator competences which also ensure that the assessments are more 'fit for purpose' in the HEA terms. This is because the changes mean that assessment becomes more valid and prioritises validity over reliability, it is more transparent, and more authentic. We have found that the recent research and debate about assessment on translation modules reveals that translation programmes are already engaged in the sort of

considerations of assessment that the HEA is encouraging universities to adopt in order to help them respond positively to the government's proposed reforms to the HE sector. However, the responses from the survey suggest that in respect to the tenets on including assessment literacy and ensuring reliability of professional judgement, there is more work to be done in strengthening these areas.

We believe that first-hand information about current trends in terms of LOs, assessment instruments and criteria on core translation modules can inform a debate into assessment parity across UK universities or refining existing sets of assessment criteria. An insight into how translator competence models have been adopted can also inform decisions for changing policies in line with the HEA, and being engaged in this process can help courses to ensure their practices meet the required standards under the HEA framework.

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank the university representatives who generously completed the survey for the purpose of our case study.

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¹ See Huertas Barros and Buendía Castro (2017) for a description of some representative online resources available for translators, particularly for legal translation.

² Other: Adjustment of LOs to the EMT criteria.