Article

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"Feedback must be a two-way exchange": A qualitative study of how translation students perceive feedback

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Abstract: In this article we are interested in one of the possible modalities of feedback generated in the training of future translators at university level: the written corrective feedback (WCF) offered by teachers on students' translations. More specifically, using data obtained from two focus groups and a questionnaire, we have explored the perceptions of translation students regarding the features and usefulness of the feedback they received during their degree programme. The results show that students perceive WCF as a unidirectional transmission of information and not as a dialogical learning cycle, as the most current approaches to feedback postulate. They also call for feedback that is precise, informative, orientating and adjusted to student needs. At the same time, they believe that feedback should offer corrections without adopting a reproving tone; it should include explanations about errors in the translation; it should point to where the work successfully fulfils learning goals; and it should incorporate suggestions for improvement that can be applied in future translation tasks. The descriptive findings presented here bear on current teaching practices in the translation classroom and point to possible areas where such practices might be improved to enhance the development by students of translation competencies.
Keywords: feedback; translation teaching; student perceptions.

1. Introduction

The concept of feedback has aroused considerable interest in higher education. It is widely acknowledged that—together with the quality of teaching itself—feedback constitutes one of the most powerful tools by which to promote teaching–learning processes (Hattie & Clark, 2018). In broad terms, feedback can be defined as a type of pedagogical assistance whose long-term goal is to promote self-regulation on the part of the learner (Espasa & Meneses, 2010). From constructivist perspectives, it represents one of the pillars of formative assessment, that is, assessment which

serves to monitor the learning process and which is oriented towards helping the student self-regulate how they learn, a fundamental competency for life-long learning (Butler & Winne, 1995).

In the context of the teaching–learning of translation at university level, the teaching paradigm generally includes joint commentary by teacher and students during class time about translations the students have done previously outside of class (Kiraly, 2014; Colina, 2003). A large part of the formative assessment that is generated in such exchanges occurs orally: the teacher or students identify faulty or successful instances of translation, explain why they judge it so and, in collaborative fashion, engage in critical discussion of any alternative solutions. At the same time, this oral feedback is complemented in the course design by the one-way assessment by the teacher of written student work as part of the summative assessment that is usually mandatory in translation programmes. This written corrective feedback (henceforth WCF) constitutes a communicative act of didactic intervention in the students' translations (Tapia, 2016, p. 17) and plays an important role in the programme, consistent with the predominance of summative assessment in higher education overall (Agricola *et al*., 2020). Both the form and the focus of the message that the teacher transmits through WCF have a bearing on student reflection and learning (Dawson *et al*., 2019) given that they generate an emotional response in students that determines the extent to which they will become involved in the feedback process by taking measures to self-regulate (Way, 2019).

The object of interest in the present study is the various forms of feedback offered in the training of future translators. Unlike other studies in which we have analysed how this feedback is perceived from the perspective of teachers (Cañada & Andújar, 2023, 2024), here we propose to examine student perceptions of feedback, the uses they make of it and how they would characterise high-quality feedback in their particular educational context. Our interest in this focus revolves around the fact that there exists a close link between students' perceptions of feedback and their profitable use thereof (Winstone *et al*., 2017). Therefore, only by means of a prior description of student perceptions is it possible to determine how feedback might be improved in ways that enhance its usefulness.

2. Feedback: From unidirectionality to dialogism

The conceptualization of feedback has undergone significant evolution in recent years, the previously commonplace notion that it is a unidirectional transmission of information from teacher to student being supplanted by the current view that it is a much broader process involving the active participation of all those involved in the teaching–learning process. In a study now regarded as a classic, Hattie and Timperley (2007) laid the foundations for effective feedback by suggesting that it must answer three crucial questions:

> Where am I going? (i.e., what are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), and Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?) These questions correspond to the notions of feedup, feedback and feedforward (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p. 86).

According to these authors, feedup refers to information about the desired goals of learning; feedback identifies the point where the student finds her/himself on the path to achieving those

goals; and feedforward projects the learning process into the future by telling the student what she or he needs to know in order to produce better output in subsequent tasks.

The concepts of feedup, feedback and feedforward indicate steps in a process in which first the student is helped to define learning goals, and then feedback from the teacher or peers is generated, processed through discussion, implemented in an improved product and finally applied in future tasks. This dynamic constitutes a formative learning cycle (Brookhart, 2014; Brooks *et al*., 2019; and Dirkx *et al*., 2021, among others) that can be conceptualised as a loop, because when feedback succeeds in generating actions on the part of the student, it closes that cycle but opens a new one (Carless, 2019). In this conceptualisation, student involvement is crucial both in the short term, because the student works to improve the task immediately at hand, and in the long term, because the student also develops more effective learning strategies overall. Feedback therefore is much more than just an isolated package of information and recommendations about a specific task: it must consist rather of "dialogic processes whereby learners make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance their work or learning strategies" (Carless, 2016, p. 15). This new model calls on the student to adopt an active role and thus become the driver of their own learning process (Ajjawi & Boud, 2017; Carless & Boud, 2018).

Researchers have focused their interest not only on the goal of feedback and the elements that bear on this (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) but also on its functions (Glover & Brown, 2006; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; and Derham *et al*., 2022, among others). According to Kulhavy and Stock (1989, p. 285), for example, in order for feedback to foster learning it must serve a twofold informative function: on one hand, it must offer information about what the student has done well or not, along with the correct answer if necessary (the "verification component"); and, on the other, it must provide information above and beyond the error which will allow the student to move forward and become independent in her or his learning (the "elaboration component"). This idea is directly linked to the idea that feedback about a specific task should be complemented by guidance to students about how to apply that feedback in subsequent tasks (Duncan *et al*., 2007; Rae & Cochrane, 2008).

3. Feedback and research in translation training

Since 2000, in line with constructivist lines of thought, student-centered and process-oriented approaches to translation training have become commonplace (Kiraly, 2000, 2014). In parallel, research in the teaching of translation has also expanded, with the result that not only have new approaches to teaching been proposed but also "empirical data have been gathered that more accurately reflect the real context in which the approaches are intended to be applied and, in addition, attempts have been made to validate these approaches through empirical evidence" (Hurtado Albir, 2019, p. 6, our translation). Nonetheless, in spite of its clear formative value for the acquisition and development of translation-related competencies, feedback has only recently begun to attract the interest of researchers.

One of the first studies to address feedback in the translation classroom is Dollerup (1994). Dollerup proposed three modalities that would situate the student at the centre of feedback: corrections by teachers written on the translations themselves; oral commentaries about the solutions provided; and a personalized written form detailing the strengths and weaknesses of the

student's work. Subsequent studies have explored various aspects of feedback, including the benefits of feedback in virtual teaching (Neunzig & Tanqueiro, 2005), peer feedback (Wang & Han, 2013), positive feedback (Conde, 2016), group feedback (Pietrzak, 2017), and WCF and the various modalities thereof (Washbourne, 2014; Andújar & Cañada, 2020). Among the most recent studies related to translation training in the Spanish context are those by Way (2019) and Haro-Soler (2022). In the former, the author adapts Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick's (2006) proposals regarding good feedback practices within the framework of the self-regulated learning model to translation training and then applies these principles in motivational interviews with students with the goal of enhancing the students' motivation and learning strategies. For her part, Haro-Soler (2022) analyses the influence of feedback in student beliefs about their own self-efficacy and concludes that, regardless of whether its focus is positive, negative, indirect or elaborate, constructive feedback grounded in dialogue between teachers and students is most likely to exert the greatest influence on student beliefs regarding self-efficacy. By contrast, when feedback revolves exclusively around errors, it has the opposite effect.

The work we present here forms part of the body of research focusing on the teachers' and students' beliefs and perceptions regarding various aspects of the learning cycle. This is an area that has received relatively little scholarly attention in connection with translation training, a noteworthy exception being the study by Južnič (2013). In this questionnaire-based case study, Južnič examined the teachers' and students' beliefs and perceptions regarding the feedback they gave and received respectively in translation classes at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. The results revealed discrepancies between teachers and students, with students perceiving that the feedback they received concentrated on grammatical, lexical or stylistic errors, whereas the teachers claimed that they focused most on metalinguistic issues like text type or function. The orientation of feedback was also perceived differently: while students believed that the comments they received were primarily negative, teachers insisted that the feedback they gave students was frequently positive.

More recently, various studies have pursued this line, comparing in depth teacher and student views regarding different training aspects that they give or receive respectively. Huertas Barros and Vine (2019), for example, used questionnaires to study the two groups' perceptions of assessment at a British university. For her part, Haro-Soler (2017) used the focus group technique to analyse teachers' perceptions of teaching practices intended to promote student self-confidence. Focusing instead on students, Li *et al*. (2015) examined student perceptions of project-based learning, while Tsai (2022) looked at how students perceived automatic translation in the acquisition of an additional language. In another study, Haro-Soler and Singer (2022) applied qualitative and mixed methods to explore how students perceived their own self-confidence and identity at one Spanish and two Chilean universities. These studies all have in common the fact that they focus on the teachers' and students' beliefs and perceptions with the ultimate goal of improving the training of future translators. With the same goal in mind, having dealt elsewhere with the teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding assessment and feedback (Cañada & Andújar, 2023), we propose here to explore student's perceptions of feedback, adopting to that end a qualitative analysis approach, which we will now describe.

4. Description of the study

4.1 The educational context

This study was carried out in the context of two undergraduate degree programmes offered by a Spanish university, one in translation and interpreting and the other combining translation and interpreting with applied linguistics. The academic year at this institution is divided into ten-week trimesters, with class sessions alternating between large-group lectures and small-group tutorial sessions. Students are taught to translate from English, French and German into Catalan and Spanish. The number of group sections per subject depends on the total number of students enrolled, so the size of groups may vary. The teacher profile also varies somewhat, although final responsibility for the subject is always the person who gives the full-group lectures. This individual is also in charge of course design, planning and assessment, as well as the coordination of the various other teachers involved in the subject.

In both general and specialised translation subjects the assessment of learning is primarily summative rather than formative. Students are required to carry out a stipulated number of evaluable assignments (known as *prácticas*) in the course of the trimester, each one representing a particular percentage of the total mark. Generally, there is also a final exam, which constitutes a relatively high proportion of the final mark.

4.2 Goals and methodology

The primary goal of this study was to explore the perception of translation students regarding the feedback they received in the general or specialised translation subjects they had taken. A secondary goal was to use this data as a basis for tentative proposals by which to improve teaching practices. Our specific research questions were therefore as follows:

Q1. How do students characterise the feedback they have received?

Q2. What feedback modalities have they experienced and which ones do they consider most valuable in formative terms?

Q3. Do the students make any use of the feedback they receive? If so, how do they do this?

Q4. What concept do the students have of high-quality feedback in translation training?

The principal data-collection procedure we employed was the focus group (Callejo, 2001; Ho, 2006). This instrument is well suited for determining the perceptions of a small group of participants relative to a particular area of study, in the present case, translation students relative to the feedback given them on their academic work. In the field of Translation Studies, this qualitative research technique has been used successfully in recent studies such as Calvo-Ferrer (2023), Haro-Soler (2022), Haro-Soler and Singer (2022), and Huertas Barros and Vigier Moreno (2010), among others.

Two focus groups of students were formed, one consisting of three women and one man, all third-year students, the other made up of four women and one man, all fourth-year students. Once fully informed about the goal of the activity, the participants signed an informed consent form

giving their permission to be recorded during the discussions, which were moderated by an expert. The sessions began with participants informally introducing themselves in order to establish rapport, and then proceeded to semi-guided discussion of the questions presented by the expert (Kitzinger, 1994). The two group discussions were recorded and the recordings were then transcribed verbatim for analysis. The total duration of the two discussions was three hours and 24 minutes.

The first phase of analysis consisted of an inductive coding process intended to break the information into fragments and then organise it into categories and subcategories, facilitated by Atlas.ti (version 24) software, for subsequent content analysis (Krippendorff, 1980). One of the authors assigned codes to the fragments of transcript and analysed and interpreted them, identifying themes and subthemes. Then both authors reexamined all the coded fragments, discussing any items that seemed open to different interpretations, until consensus was reached on definitive coding for the full dataset. During this phase, any discrepancy of opinion between the two authors was resolved by re-examining the item in question and discussing it with a third researcher, a member of the same research group, if necessary.

In the second phase, the data obtained from the focus groups were cross-correlated with the responses to a questionnaire based on an instrument originally designed by Henderson *et al.* (2016), with permission from the authors. The questionnaire, essentially exploratory in purpose, consisted of 46 questions about two principal themes: on the one hand, the beliefs and experiences of translation students with regard to assessment and feedback received from teachers; and on the other, the frequency and usefulness of the modalities of feedback they had experienced. Thirty third- and fourth-year students in the same two-degree programmes as the focus group participants answered the questionnaire. Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire responses was then carried out using SAS software (version 9.4, SAS Institute Inc.).

In the following sections we present our analysis of the data gathered through the focus groups and then correlate that with the questionnaire responses in order to answer the four research questions posed above.

5. Analysis of focus group data

5.1 Features of the feedback received

The students described feedback as a form of response, primarily written and almost always linked to a mark. This WCF always referred to a finished textual product and was received for the most part in the same format used by the student. For example, when the translation was submitted to the teacher as a digital text file, a revised version of the same file (with or without the use of Word's "show changes" function) was returned to the student. The students reacted positively to the occasional use by teachers of other, complementary channels, such as audio messages, as we see in the following transcript excerpt:

> A teacher posted voice messages giving feedback. Well, so that's of interest because it's sort of like what happens with whatsapps, right? Written words you can interpret any way you want… But if the discourse is more oral, with a bit more expression, in the end you think "Well, so she thinks I did a lot of things badly, but she also thinks I more or less achieved my objectives" I reckon that's pretty good [F1E4].

Students felt, then, that this combination of two channels had the effect of mitigating somewhat the immediate negative sensation that resulted from getting back a translation with a lot of corrective mark-up. However, this technique was presumably not used by most teachers given that it was mentioned only in connection with a few specific courses.

In the students' view, it was important that not too much time should elapse between turning in an assignment and receiving the feedback on it. They felt that they needed time to assimilate the mistakes they had made with sufficient margin to avoid repeating them in future assignments.

> Some of my classmates didn't receive their marks on the assignments or exercises until it was nearly time for the final exam. So you spend three months doing things you think are right and then two weeks before the exam you get some marks, and—surprise!—they're not good" [F2E4].

Students unanimously claimed that the feedback that evaluated the quality of the translation inevitably contained a subjective component which was reflected in the mark. "I think it's the corrections on the translations that are the least objective. Really, you can get a mark that is higher or lower than another person whose translation was pretty similar" [F1E1] This perceived subjectivity, albeit perhaps implicit in the nature of translation itself, was believed to be linked to each professor's style, to which students tried to adapt: "If I think the teacher's preferences about how to translate are going to be involved […] as a student, you have to start to adapt a bit, because in the end what you want is the mark too" [F2E2]. Some participants viewed this positively because they connected it with the idiosyncrasies they were likely to encounter in the real world of professional translating: "I don't see this as a bad thing […] because when you work for a publishing company or whatever you're also going to have to adapt to what they're asking for" [F2E3].

From participants' comments we can infer that they considered the WCF that they received to be unidirectional. They reported few opportunities for dialogue with their teacher because the feedback was almost always focused on the specific task being evaluated and did not go beyond that: "You handed in the translation and they returned it with coloured mark-up, what was good highlighted in yellow and what was bad in red, and there was no possibility of dialogue" [F1E3]. However, the students felt that certain classroom activities did indeed foster dialogue, and they perceived such activities to be useful for their training. This was the case, for example, with classroom discussions of WCF: "Commenting on corrections during class time has always worked well for me because that way you get feedback but you can also discuss it with the teacher" [F1E4]. These open commentaries on translation assignments helped them to see the various valid translation options that differed from what they had written: "I think it's fantastic because we see that there are a whole range of different solutions" [F2E3].

The fact that the focus of WCF tended to be, for the most part, errors in their translation assignments frequently drew negative comments from focus group participants: "Sometimes we turn in stuff and the feedback we get is a Word document with things marked red" [F1E3]. By contrast, they attached high motivational value in the learning process to positive feedback: "I also like it when they tell me when I do things right too. Even if it's just to compensate [for the negative feedback] a little […]: 'You did this wrong, but this part is good'. Even if it's just to say 'Carry on, you're doing fine'" [F2E2].

5.2 Frequency and relative utility of feedback modalities

The WCF that the participants received appeared in various modalities, the most common of which were comments by the teacher, a numerical mark, direct corrections of errors, colour-coding and graphic resources such as abbreviations or symbols.

Teacher comments on the translation, inserted manually by the professor into the student text, were the modality of WCF that was most positively assessed by the students. In their view, this was the most appropriate way to offer the explanations and suggestions for how to improve that they regarded as indispensable to high-quality WCF:

> Assessment must give you instruments by which to improve. It shouldn't be just marking what you've done wrong or marking with colours or underlining and then writing a final grade, rather they should write comments about why there is a mistake here and how you could do better the next time [F1E3].

At the same time, the students felt it was important that comments focusing on a specific aspect of their translation should be accompanied by an overall comment, since the combination of the two levels of commentary constituted the most complete and useful sort of feedback.

> What I think is most useful is comments that are really detailed, really well written. Wherever there was a mistake the teacher explained it and gave her reasons and even offered alternative solutions. And at the end of the assignment, she wrote a comment about the text saying how she saw it overall, which really encouraged me to keep going. Of course, I think that as a student and as a person, you see that they recognize that you have put work into it, that you may have made some mistakes, but they put in the time and show the dedication and the desire to explain. I value that very positively [F2E5].

Regarding the awarding of a number mark to the translation as a form of feedback, the participants lamented the preponderance of summative assessment in their degree programmes. At the same time, most admitted that marks were important, because in the end it was what the academic system required, even if they did not all view this circumstance positively:

> The fact that they perceive knowledge as a number is […] very imprecise. I think that from a very early age you learn that if you got a [mark of] seven [out of ten] you were doing OK and if you got a four you weren't. I don't think it's a flaw of this degree programme, rather it's a flaw in the system overall [F2E5].

As could also be seen with the other modalities of WCF, students reported that whenever they received a mark, they wanted to also see an explanation for that mark: "A mark, you know? I mean, she gave me seven, but why?" [F1E2]. If the mark was to be useful, they felt, the mark had to be explained and justified by reference to clearly defined criteria of quality:

> The criteria, right? Because it is very useful for me, really important that there are some clear assessment criteria so I know why I was given this mark and as a function of what, right? I've had teachers who, for example, only give you a numerical mark and you don't know why or why not, or even why you got one point more in this translation than in the previous one. So that's pretty strange [F1E4].

Understanding the indicators of success in advance, in addition to justifying the mark, had a positive impact on the student's efforts because it served to orient:

> If you have some criteria […] and then they have evaluated you on the basis of those criteria, on the one hand you understand better the mark they've given you, and on the other, I guess you will have done it better because that information was available to you [F1E2].

If students knew the marking criteria, they understood what is expected of them, could interpret the WCF they had received and were less likely to call the mark into question. "[Transparency in the criteria] increases performance in general and prevents a lot of conflict when it comes to accepting the feedback they've given you" [F1E3].

Direct correction—when the teacher inserted a correct solution to a translation error into the document itself—elicited differing views from focus group participants. On one hand, students appreciated the fact the teacher was suggesting a correct alternative, which they regarded as essential orientation, especially in the early stages of training: "If you don't know what the right choice of words is, when you see your work marked, you're likely to keep on making the same mistake because you won't understand why it's wrong" [F1E3]. Nevertheless, the participants felt that this might be interpreted as meaning that the solution offered was the only possible correct translation, when in fact there might be many other equally valid alternatives: "In translation, it's not all black and white. So sometimes it's like 'This is wrong and here is right answer', but they shouldn't be giving the idea that there is only one correct possibility" [F1E4].

For students it was therefore important to be always bear in mind that the solution proposed by the teacher was simply one of several possible correct translations, and they appreciated it when the teacher acknowledged that:

> I especially like it when they indicate alternatives, and if there is more than one, it tells me that the teacher knows that the first idea he's proposed for the translation is not the only one. This is really important in translation: there is no single correct answer [F2E1].

With regard to colour-coding, the students liked the fact this WCF modality allowed the classification of errors according to their type and degree of seriousness: "I think it's a good system because it's specific and it gives you a very exact idea of the kind of mistake" [F2E5]. When they received this type of WCF, they reported, the first thing they checked was which items were highlighted in green, the colour teachers tended to use to mark successfully translated elements. However, as was the case with the use of symbols or abbreviations, students felt that the absence of explanations or alternative translations limited the formative potential of this modality. "I think that using green highlighter is cool, because they are telling you that you did something well, but at the same time they're not telling you the best translation or how to improve" [F1E2]. Finally, participants pointed out that colour-coding was not really appropriate for students with disabilities or sight problems: "I'm colour-blind, right? They are discriminating against me. If they use colour-coding, it's impossible for me" [F1E1].

As noted, students also regarded the use of symbols or abbreviations as of little use if they were not accompanied by a key explaining their meaning: "If they just write a tick or a cross that doesn't give me any information" [F1E1]. In fact, in the absence of such explanations—whether

offered previously or subsequently to the assignment—students sometimes could not figure out the meaning of a symbol at all.

5.3 The use of feedback in the learning process

The informants valued positively receiving individualised information about their work in the form of WCF:

> In a classroom where there are at least X number of students it is sometimes hard to know if what you're doing is right. I think that good feedback […] can give you a lot of information to know whether you're on the right track or not, and how to improve [F2E1].

From what these students said it was apparent that they worked with the WCF they received in a variety of ways that did not necessarily respond to the teacher's instructions and ranged from merely acknowledging its presence ("Yeah, sure, you look at it" [F1E3]) to an analysis whose depth depended on the student's degree of interest:

> For me, feedback is looking at the document and then analysing it […] That's what you do, but someone else might look at the mark and say 'Crazy, a five! Next…' Everybody reacts to feedback and does whatever they think is appropriate depending on their goals for the degree, what interests them in that subject [F2E2].

On occasion, the use of WCF was linked to grading and more specifically to the expectations that the students had regarding the mark that they were going to receive for their work. If the mark met their expectations, they did not bother to analyse the WCF in any depth: "You get the mark; if you're happy, that's that" [F2E2].

When students did analyse the WCF, they reported, focusing on their errors showed them their areas of weakness, and this helped them to be more careful in subsequent assignments: "For the next assignment, you open up the previous assignment, you analyse it and say 'What did I do wrong?' Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake now" [F2E4]. Some even went further by maintaining a list of all mistakes made in previous translations. In the view of these students, this learning strategy helped them avoid making the same mistakes again and thus progressively improve their work, especially in the earlier stages of their training: "For translations I had a list of criteria like 'Hey, check this, this, this and this', especially at first. Now I don't do it so much, but at first when I was less expert and more insecure, I did" [F1E4].

5.4 The features of "ideal" feedback

The participants felt that ideally feedback should be "orienting" [F2E1] and should also be given "at the right time" [F1E4, F2E2, F2E4]. They also felt that it should be "personalized" [F1E4], "part of a dialogue between teacher and student" [F1E1, F2E1] and "an opportunity for learning [F1E2]. Finally, students said that it should be "justified" [F1E3], "go beyond being just a grade" [F1E1, F2E3] and "allow improvement" [F1E3, F2E2, F2E3]. However, informants acknowledged that it might not be easy for teachers to provide feedback with those features because it required time

and effort, and the teacher/student ratio in the university classes they attended did not facilitate the teacher's job:

> I understand why the teachers complain that assessing student work takes a lot of time, that it's very tedious and requires a lot of effort… But we really appreciate their taking the time, you know? […] If you take seriously the fact that we're learning, then we're really grateful for that [F1E3].

The students insisted on the need for explanations about why their mistakes were wrong, as well as the provision of correct alternatives, whether in writing or orally. In their view, such detailed, explicit feedback led to learning that would be transferrable to other translation assignments, something they viewed very positively. As a result, another feature of ideal feedback was that it should be focused less on product than on process:

> I mean, yeah, you can tell me 'Well, I don't agree with the translation you have come up with, but I can see that behind that translation there is a lengthy process and maybe within that process we can detect some kind of mistake, something else that you haven't learnt well.' That helps [F1E3].

This kind of bidirectional communication between teacher and student was precisely what students most frequently called for: "[Feedback] shouldn't be unidirectional, in the sense that I hand something in and you return something to me, but rather it should be an open back-and-forth channel" [F1E2]. Thus, they felt that feedback must consist of a two-way exchange: "Exchange is a very apt term for this, because it's a way to communicate between teacher and student" [F2E1].

6. Comparison with questionnaire data

As noted above, the qualitative results obtained from the focus groups were cross-referenced with responses from the questionnaire, which was designed to identify student experiences with and perceptions of assessment and feedback in their translation subjects. The questionnaire items were thus well suited for comparison with comments made during the focus groups.

A majority of questionnaire respondents (70%) reported doing three or four evaluated translation assignments per trimester. Because WCF was linked to these evaluated assignments, it addressed the finished text product rather than the translation process per se, so questionnaire responses corroborated what was said by group discussion participants. A similar majority (86.7%) of respondents said that they had received feedback on these evaluated assignments. Thus, questionnaire responses also reflected the connection drawn by focus group participants between written feedback and summative assessment.

The questionnaire results revealed that reflection-oriented instruments about the learning process, such as portfolios, reflection reports or learning diaries were rarely employed in the degree programmes, unlike translations of text fragments and exams, which were nearly always given a mark and constituted the usual graded elements. This was consistent with the perception among group discussion participants regarding the scarcity of formative activities or activities focusing on reflection about the learning process.

The questionnaire results also corroborated focus group statements about the channels by which students received feedback, since 50% of the respondents claimed to have received feedback only through digital means, while the other 50% stated that they "occasionally" received paper assignments with annotated corrections by the teacher. No reference was made to any other feedback modality. With regard to the time elapsed between turning in an assignment and getting it back from the teacher, the questionnaire response indicated that this was mostly either two weeks (66.3%) or one week (23.3%).

Regarding the focus of feedback, nearly half of respondents indicated that teachers "mostly" pointed out weaknesses in student translation (the proportion rose to 76.6% if "always" and "often" responses were added to the "mostly" responses), while 70% of respondents stated that positive aspects of translations were commented on "occasionally". These questionnaire results were thus consistent with the perceptions of focus group participants, who, as we have seen, also noted the predominance of comments about errors in the feedback they received.

Comments by translation teachers was the highest ranked WCF modality for both questionnaire respondents and focus group participants, while the awarding of a mark unaccompanied by any sort of information about the work done ranked the lowest. Colour-coding represented the second-highest rated modality for questionnaire respondents, though focus group participants felt it was of limited usefulness in the absence of explanations of errors or suggestions for improvement. According to the questionnaire responses, direct correction was the most common modality (46.6% of respondents said they received it "often") as well as the most useful, although teachers used it less often than respondents said they would have liked.

Finally, an insistence by focus group participants on the need for clear criteria coincided with the questionnaire data. A clear majority of questionnaire respondents felt that the feedback did not justify the mark received, with 33.3% indicating that this was "never" the case, and 46.6% saying this was "occasionally" true. Many respondents also noted that they were infrequently shown how to improve their work in future translations (half stated that his happened "occasionally"). Nor were suggestions offered about how to explore in further detail some aspects of the translation—46.6% stated that this happened "never" and 36.6% encountered such suggestions "occasionally".

7. Discussion and conclusions

The design and implementation of assessment and feedback are two areas of teaching that bear directly on students' self-regulation of their learning because in principle they are intended to help students identify which aspects of their learning to improve and how to do so (Haro-Soler, 2022; Way, 2019). In the present study, using data obtained from two focus groups and a questionnaire, we have explored the perceptions of translation students regarding the features and usefulness of the feedback they received in the course of their degree programme.

In our first research question we asked how students characterised the feedback they received. Our informants reported that most feedback was WCF associated with a numerical mark, part of the summative assessment required in translation subjects. For the focus group participants, "feedback" was what they received in writing when a translation assignment was returned to them with a partial mark. They therefore in effect used the term as a synonym for "correction". This focus on marking (Hounsell, 2007) offers a restricted conceptualisation of feedback that excludes activities

such as oral commentary on translation in the classroom, teacher-student interactions during office hours and questions to resolve doubts put to the teacher in informal contexts. In general, informants here had an essentially monologic concept of feedback, given that they did not seem to regard as instances of feedback the situations in which oral interaction took place.

The informants here indicated that feedback was always conveyed in writing, with little mention made of other more innovative channels such as audio or video, which, though they have not been shown to be more impactful on learning (Espasa *et al.,* 2022), can be more motivating due to their novelty. With regard to the moment at which feedback was provided, a certain discrepancy can be observed between the data obtained in this respect from the focus groups on the one hand and the questionnaire on the other. According to the former, the general perception was that feedback was not received with sufficient time to allow correction of errors committed previously. By contrast, 66.3% of questionnaire respondents indicated that they received WCF within two weeks after turning in an assignment. In this regard, the literature on the topic has repeatedly pointed to the need for feedback to be provided relatively quickly, either while the task is being carried out or immediately afterwards, but in any case with sufficient margin that the feedback can be analysed, assimilated and then applied by the student in the subsequent translation task (Black & Wiliam, 1998 or Mulline & Tucker, 2017, among others).

The model of feedback described by group discussion participants is WCF transmitted unidirectionally to a student by the teacher and which consists primarily of pointing out errors in the student's translation. This focus on errors revealed by the data is consistent with the findings of other studies such as Dirkx *et al*. (2021) and Derham *et al*. (2022). What they experienced, then, was essentially corrective or "directive" feedback (Washbourne, 2014, p. 245), which was centred around the product rather than the process of translation. As a result, it only rarely touched on methodological aspects of the translation such as documentation or revision, even though these elements play fundamental roles in the production of high quality translation.

According to these students, teachers tended to adopt a sanctioning role in their WCF given that the comments, symbols or direct corrections that comprised it focused on errors and only rarely on elements of the translation that were competently executed. Nonetheless, the literature contains abundant evidence that positive feedback is useful not only because it boosts student self-esteem, motivation and involvement (Conde, 2016; Pitt & Norton, 2017) but also because it consolidates learning that has already been acquired that can then be transferred to subsequent translation assignments (Derham *et al*., 2022). In other words, positive comments serve a motivational function because they stimulate students to continue to learn and improve. That said, however, recent studies on the impact of emotions on student translators, such as Rojo and Ramos Caro (2016) or Kimovska and Cvetkoski (2021), note that the tone and content of feedback can have different emotional consequences depending on the personality profile of the student.

As stated in Rojo and Ramos Caro (2016, p. 124), "Corrective feedback and plain criticism may have negative consequences for low resilient translators but may work wonders with high resilient personalities who may still manage to focus on producing an accurate translation". As a consequence, in light of our own findings as well as the evidence available elsewhere, in order to move towards making feedback in the translation training context more truly formative, greater attention should be paid to its constructive aspect, which is any element in the feedback, whether

positive or negative, which offers students guidance in how to improve their work (Huxham, 2007 *apud* Haro-Soler, 2022, p. 197).

The frequency and utility of feedback modalities experienced by the informants in this study constitute the topic covered by our second research question. Our findings showed that the modalities most often encountered by these students were written comments, whether overall or focused on a specific aspect of the student's work, numerical assessment marks, direct corrections, colour-coding and the use of symbols or abbreviations, with one modality nearly always appearing in combination with another (Andújar & Cañada, 2020). Of these modalities, the one informants reported preferring most was comments centred on specific aspect of the translation, especially when they were accompanied by a more general comment addressing the text as a whole or suggestions for improvement in future assignments.

In general, whether informants rated these modalities of WCF positively or negatively depended on whether they included the three components which students regarded as indispensable for feedback to be formative: a) an explanation of why the mistake in question was wrong; b) a possible correct solution by way of guidance (especially in the early stages of their training); and c) indications on how to improve in future assignments. Thus, students regarded as most formative those modalities that provided the greatest amount of detail about their errors and suggestions on how to make progress in their learning process. This perception from students is consistent with the findings of other studies such as Kulhavy and Stock (1989) and Glover and Brown (2006).

In order for feedback to be effective and transferable, it would seem obvious that the student must first understand it, assimilate it and be able to apply it. This would explain why the informants considered less formative those feedback modalities they did not understand in the absence of clarification of its meaning, such as symbols, abbreviations or other graphic elements. As noted by other authors, not being able to interpret feedback constitutes another obstacle that limits both its effectiveness and the use that students make of it in their learning process (Winstone *et al*., 2017). This suggests that it is important to facilitate the appropriation by students of the assessment criteria as well as feedback modalities by working on them explicitly in the classroom. For example, before receiving an assignment that will be given a mark, teachers could propose activities in which the students have to apply the marking criteria as they evaluate translations by other students or their own work, or even by published translations. This exercise will likely not only lead to a better understanding of the feedback they will subsequently receive but also the development of keener evaluative skills—to say nothing of competence in learning to learn (Tai *et al*., 2018).

Our third research question was about the use students made of the feedback they received. This is in fact one of the issues that generates most interest in the field at the moment (Carless, 2015). In this connection, the literature stresses the importance of integrating into lesson plans opportunities for students to assimilate the contents of WCF received and then to apply it in future work (Molloy *et al*., 2018, and others). In translation training, this learning transfer takes place not only in the writing of new assignments but also in the revising of preliminary drafts (Washbourne, 2014, p. 13). However, the informants here made no mention of the possibility of turning in second drafts of translations that had been improved thanks to WCF, even though this is common practice in related disciplines like the teaching of additional languages, the goal being to encourage learner autonomy (Bailini, 2020). WCF here was being applied to a finished product, so it may be inferred that no revised drafts were turned in. As we saw with our informants here and as also pointed out

by other authors, if the teacher does not build WCF explicitly into the assignment, the use made of it and the reflection induced by it depend entirely on the profile and level of engagement of the individual student (Narciss, 2008; Winstone *et al*., 2017).

The link between expectations about marks and the use of feedback mentioned in the student comments here are also well documented elsewhere in the literature (Hounsell, 2007; Winstone *et al*., 2017). Most significantly, students tend to ignore WCF if they are satisfied with the mark they have received. This focus on marks—surely motivated in large part by the traditionally heavy emphasis on summative assessment in the Spanish education system—constitutes an obstacle to student engagement in the learning process given that it indirectly impedes information exchange between teacher and student regarding the latter's work, thereby interrupting the feedback spiral (Carless, 2006).

In order to integrate WCF that generates transferable learning fully into the curriculum, in the early stages of translation training students could be required to submit revised second drafts of translations in which they are expected to incorporate the feedback they have received (Séguinot, 1991; Washbourne, 2014). Activities such as the drawing up of error checklists or correction grids can be useful in this connection. In later stages of training, student could be assigned more complex translation tasks involving various stages of preparation and submission in which they must first show assimilation of the WCF received before proceeding to write the next draft (Cano, 2015, p. 176)

At the same time, in addition to always explaining clearly what they expect students to do with the WCF they receive, teachers could encourage students to play a more active role by explicitly urging them to discuss their work with the teacher or analyse in greater detail some aspect of their translation. Similarly, in order to encourage students to reflect more on their work, teachers could ask them questions that oblige them to think about the applicability of their WCF to future assignments (Carless & Boud, 2018; Molloy *et al*., 2018). In short, classroom dynamics could be put into practice that promote student self-regulation and reduce student dependence on explicit instructions from the teacher.

Finally, our last research question asked what the students regarded as high-quality feedback in the context of translation training. Their responses essentially coincided with evidence appearing consistently in the literature that feedback must be precise, informative, orientating and adjusted to student needs. At the same time, feedback should be provided to the student promptly after an assignment is submitted, it should offer corrections without adopting a reproving tone, it should include explanations about errors in the translation, it should point to where the work successfully fulfils learning goals, and it should incorporate suggestions for improvement that can be applied in future endeavours. One of the most frequent student complaints reported here referred to the need for dialogue and exchange with the teacher, a point that is fully in keeping with other studies that conceptualise feedback as a form of communicative exchange between participants in an ongoing process (see, for example, Nicol, 2010, or Beaumont *et al*., 2011). These studies argue that this exchange must not be limited to occasional doses of WCF, as would seem to be the case in what our informants described here, but rather should consist of a broader dialogic process that begins before the actual writing process, with some sort of orientation and guidance, continues throughout the translation task and then extends beyond it into the next assignment.

We are aware that the present study suffers from certain limitations. The context analysed here was a single educational institution—one Spanish university—and a specific academic context,

namely, undergraduate translation degree programmes. Similarly, the number of focus groups involved was small, a reflection of the difficulties that recruiting participants for this data-gathering technique entailed (Huertas Barros & Vigier Moreno, 2010, p. 194). We have tried to mitigate this latter limitation by cross-checking the results of the focus groups with responses to a questionnaire, thereby adding greater substance to our findings. However, it would be desirable in future to explore in greater depth this line of research by expanding the number of focus groups and gathering data from other educational contexts. This would allow us to determine more precisely the convergences and divergence in the perceptions of feedback among translation students.

In spite of these limitations, however, we believe that the descriptive findings presented here are of scholarly value in that they bear on current teaching practices and point to possible areas where such practices might be improved. We have attempted to point to more dialogic and thus perhaps more effective feedback practices that teachers could apply in the translation classroom to enhance the development by their students of translation competencies. Obviously, the viability of such proposals will depend on the factors conditioning each particular teaching context, such as the number of students in the classroom group, the time available and organisation of teaching duties.

In short, the desired goal of effective feedback is to bring about changes in the learning strategies of students, changes which make possible a greater degree of student engagement in their learning process and consequently enhance their ability to self-regulate their learning. The identification of obstacles to these changes constitutes a line of research that is currently being pursued in similar disciplines and which we hope to explore in future studies, thereby further refining the characterisation of high-quality feedback in translation training.

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Notes

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Data analysis: G. Andújar Moreno
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Not applicable.

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The data from this research, which are not included in this work, may be made available by the authors upon request.

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