

Article

Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez*

Inverse translation and the language student: A case study

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Abstract: This article explores the agency of the student in translation in language teaching and learning (or TILT). The purpose of the case study discussed here is to gain an overview of students' perceptions of translation into the foreign language (FL) (also known as “inverse translation”) following a module on language and translation, and to analyse whether there is any correlation between students' attitude to translation, its impact on their language learning through effort invested, and the improvement of language skills. The results of the case study reveal translation to be a potentially exciting skill that can be central to FL learning and the analysis gives indications of how and why language teachers may optimise the implementation of translation in the classroom. The outcome of the study suggests that further research is needed on the impact of translation in the language classroom focussing on both teachers' expectations and students' achievements.

Keywords: case study, foreign language teaching and learning, inverse translation, pedagogical translation, student agency, TILT

1 Introduction: Research context

The negative perception of translation in the foreign language (FL) classroom has been challenged in recent years by the rebirth of bilingual teaching (Cook 2010; Laviosa 2014; Leonardi 2010), appealing for a re-evaluation of fields that share common interests in translation in the language classroom (or TILT) namely translation studies, language education and applied linguistics. This advocacy of bilingualism has triggered an interest in practices relating to language use,

*Corresponding author: Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland, E-mail: lucia.pintado@dcu.ie

translation, and language education. Traditional concerns regarding the implementation of translation in language teaching methodologies which have been documented extensively are challenged under this new approach. Research led by García-Medall (2001), Malmkjær (1998), and Pegenaute (1996) represent an initial contestatory body of work which questions traditional criticisms of translation in FL, on the grounds that new perspectives on translation studies and language pedagogy made it necessary to revisit the exhaustive black list of reasons that compelled teachers to ostracise translation completely. Particularly interesting is Malmkjær's (1998) work, whose edited volume reconciled the areas of translation and FL teaching. A pioneer in the advocacy of the use of translation in FL, she explored the value of pedagogical translation upon reassessing traditional arguments against its use and putting forward constructive principles based on the positive changes that both the theoretical and the pragmatic aspects of translation and FL teaching had undergone. Similarly, approaches within translation studies reveal translation to be a communicative element that responds to some of the core interests of foreign language teaching and learning (a case for this is made by Colina 2002; Pintado Gutiérrez 2012). Promoting interdisciplinary dialogue has therefore been essential in redefining the various educational roles of translation and reassessing the nature and the significance of TILT as a valuable skill for the learner.

Initially explored by Lavault in 1985 in the context of the interpretive theory of translation (or theory of sense) and how translation could be used in a FL classroom, discussion of the pedagogical use of translation in FL teaching has become more widespread in recent years, allowing for stimulating debate in the field (see Carreres et al. 2017; Pintado Gutiérrez 2018). In this context, I identify three factors that have played a major role in reshaping the relationship between translation and language learning: the first advocates the use of the student's mother tongue in the FL classroom (see Butzkamm and Caldwell 2009; Corcoll López and González Davies 2015; Deller and Rinvulcri 2002; Duff 1989; González Davies 2004: 63; Kerr 2014; Levine 2011). The second factor promotes the potential to integrate and/or adapt translation activities in the FL classroom following the advances in translation pedagogy, among other reasons (see Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez 2011; Colina 2003; González Davies 2004; González Davies 2014; González Davies 2018; Hurtado Albir 1999). The third one revisits the notion of "mediation" in the Common European Framework for Languages Companion Volume (2018) as a communicative language and strategy which expands exponentially the possibilities of mediation in FL teaching and learning (Pintado Gutiérrez 2019). These factors indicate a dual trend: research at the crossroads of translation and language education bolsters a strong case for TILT, but current research in this field proves that this area is in need of further study.

At this point, it is worth noting that Cook's (2010) all-inclusive approach to TILT is too broad for the purposes of this study because it refers to the essential umbrella that includes translation as well as different types of language use in the FL classroom (be it L1/L2/L3). Adopting Cook's approach would not be in line with the aim of the module discussed in the case study (the only module on translation in the degree programme in question, where students translate using their language and intercultural skills) and the type of translation tasks involved (translating an array of different texts from L1 into L2). In my view, it is more appropriate to adopt the concept of pedagogical translation (or PT), which is particularly useful as it refers to "translation activities and tasks that are included in FL teaching and learning" and which "enhance the development of specific language and translating skills" (Pintado Gutiérrez 2018: 16) as opposed to general L1/L2 language use.

2 Empirical research on TILT and pedagogical translation

There have been an increasing number of studies since the 2000s on the benefits and the challenges that translation presents in FL pedagogy and the possibilities of this multifaceted tool. In virtue of the new constructs of translation in language teaching and learning, many of the weaknesses that translation in FL teaching presented in the past (enhancing interferences between L1/L2, focussing on the form rather than the content, and raising false expectations on 1:1 equivalence among others) have now been addressed through the prism of new theoretical and empirical frameworks. The legacy of the use of translation in grammar-translation methodologies and the exclusion of the mother tongue in communicative teaching are no longer reasons to reject this practice. This does not mean of course that bad praxis has vanished – hence the merit in continuing research, since there are ways of bringing translation into the classroom that are more beneficial than others, and in line with the latest pedagogical praxis. Empirical research on TILT and pedagogical translation, however, has been undertaken only recently and thus experimental data remains relatively scarce, and even more limited with regard to inverse translation.

Carreres (2006), in a thorough exploration of the usefulness of translation in FL teaching, anticipated a bright future for PT over a decade ago, noting that 100% of the undergraduate students in the Faculty of Modern Languages at the University of Cambridge see inverse translation to be a positive element. More recent publications exploring the role of PT include a volume edited by Tsagari and Floros

(2013), where translation in language teaching is regarded positively overall. Of particular interest is the study by Källkvist (2013b), where the author looks at the student-teacher interaction engendered by a translation task focussing on the student's agency. The study suggests the value of translation "as an ice-breaking activity in student groups where engendering communication involving many of the students present is a high priority" (Källkvist 2013b: 130). Källkvist (2013a) explores further the student's agency in another article, in which she examines languaging (understood as using language to discuss different aspects of language use) engendered by meaning-focused translation tasks in teacher-led discourse. The author concludes that translation tasks provide high levels of student involvement, although there are limitations in the nature of such tasks (depending on the shared L1, the goal of the task etc.) and she identifies a need for further analysis of student agency (Källkvist 2013a: 229–230). The Directorate-General for Translation and the European Commission (2013: 3) conducted a survey aimed at identifying whether translation in the language classroom is effective or whether it represents a hindrance in primary, secondary and higher education. The general findings revealed that participating L2 teachers prefer communicative teaching methodologies, but often do not see translating as a communicative act (Directorate-General for Translation 2013: 127). Other empirical studies include those by Kelly and Bruen (2014, 2017), González Davies (2014), and by Corcoll-López and González Davies (2015). While Kelly and Bruen explore the attitudes of lecturers towards the use of translation in the FL classroom, González Davies (2014) looks at translation used in educational contexts and Corcoll-López and González Davies (2015) analyse the impact of pedagogically-based code-switching (PBCS) and translation in other learning contexts (TOLC).

These empirical studies aim to explore new applications of pedagogical translation through innovative practices in various language teaching curricula. The outcomes appear to be effective for FL educators, teacher trainers, and students and indicate overall support for PT: there is a strong case to be made for the use of PT in language education and thus it is a topic worth revisiting by researchers. At the same time, there is a consensus as to the need for further research. Empirical research on directionality and PT remains rather limited, particularly in relation to critical considerations of students towards translation in the language classroom. The present study aims to contribute to this discussion by providing additional data on student attitudes to inverse PT in language learning, particularly bearing in mind some of the negative criticism PT has attracted in the past. The study seeks to explore more closely the implications of integrating translation into the L2 in the classroom and to promote future lines of investigation that will provide new insights into the value of PT.

3 A case study: The language student and inverse pedagogical translation

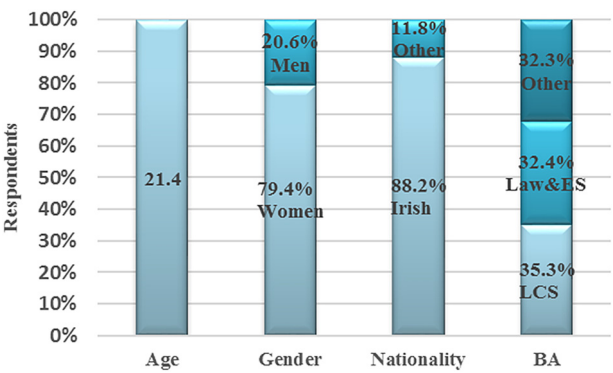
3.1 Rationale of the study and educational context

This study investigates how FL students perceive inverse PT. Analysing students' insights will allow authentic experiences to be evaluated while also facilitating a greater understanding of how students interact with the translation tasks through their own assessment. The data gathered will be explored in terms of the correlation between the students' attitude, effort (understood as the amount of work that students expend completing the tasks and studying for the module) and improvement in Spanish, with the aim of better defining the use of PT in line with students' needs. Examining students' agency through their own insights is a key in the current debate and in reshaping translation as part of the FL curriculum – although there are obvious limitations in focussing exclusively on the students' perceptions.

The questionnaire was completed by 34 students. All were final-year participants who studied Spanish as a foreign language (B2.2 level) as part of a four-year degree programme, where translation was an annual core module. Students worked on translation from English to Spanish (the focus of this study) in semester one, while they translated from Spanish to English in semester two. The first six weeks in semester one had a focus on advanced Spanish grammar, and the remaining six weeks focused on practicing inverse translation. All tasks were based on translating general texts following a brief. Students could use dictionaries and other online resources but no CAT tools were made available to them, nor had they been trained to use such tools. The module on translation was delivered alongside three other modules: textual analysis, contemporary literature, and oral skills. It was the first time that students took an annual module that focused entirely on translation. English was the L1 of the vast majority of the participants, which meant that all students worked with inverse translation, considerably more challenging than translating from the FL into the L1 – the remaining participants were from Georgia and Poland.

The profile of the 34 participants is as follows: all were final year students of a Bachelor Degree programme at an Irish university; the average age was 21.4 years old; 79.4% participants were women; 88.2% participants were Irish; participants were pursuing BA degrees in Languages and Cultural Studies (35.3%), Law and European Studies (32.4%), International Insurance and European Studies (8.8%), or European Studies (20.6%); all students spent four to 10 months in a Spanish-speaking country with the Erasmus Programme (See Table 1).

Table 1: Students’ profile.



3.2 Methodological framework

The primary focus of this study is attitude as an indicator of the students’ perception of inverse PT. Broadly speaking, attitude is understood as a set of beliefs and psychological predispositions to act in a certain way (Gardner 1985). According to Tódor and Dégi (2016: 124) language attitude is “a complex notion which can be defined as part of the existential competences, but also as a dynamic structure of learner attitudes”. Various studies (see for example Crookes and Schmidt 1989; Nunan 1990; Oxford 1990; Oxford and Ehrman 1993; Samimy and Tabuse 1991) explain at length the significant implications of attitude in the learning process of FL learners, but also in their learning outcomes. More recent studies on attitudes and motivation in language learning (see Csizér 2007; Dörnyei 2009) reveal that attitudes and motivation are strongly intertwined. Positive attitude towards learning a language may lead to increased motivation, which will in turn result in a better sense of achievement and a more positive attitude towards the language learning. The present study considers student attitude to be aligned with motivation in a way that is of huge importance to the wider dimensions of language learning. Attitude and motivation are therefore central to this study as both encapsulate students’ perception of translation while allowing other variables to be explored. If we take it that attitude and motivation are critical to learning a language successfully, this then raises the question of whether university students of Spanish as a FL find that inverse translation (L1 to L2) is a hindrance or a useful resource in learning the L2.

This study was conducted after the completion of the first semester dedicated to inverse translation, and therefore participants were able to assess their own

experiences with the translation module in semester one – experiences which were also correlated with other elements in their retrospective evaluation. Attitude and motivation were thus analysed within the “postactional stage” of a process-oriented approach, where participants assess their learning (Dörnyei 2003: 17–23). The study began by looking at the students’ prior experience with translation in language learning as a way of anticipating whether previous exposure may have an impact on self-assessment in terms of “motivational disposition” (Weiner 1992). Examination of previous experiences allows assessment of the impact of earlier activities related to the translation tasks carried out in the module. This is important in considering the perceptions of participants who had done translation before alongside those who were doing translation for the first time. Students’ previous experience is considered in the context of their effort and attitude.

The final part of the study analyses overall experience with translation in relation to other skills and the performance of the cohort on translation tasks in comparison to their performance on other language components. The aim here is to investigate how motivation and success are interrelated in the event that (as common sense probably dictates) they are found to be related (see Samimy and Tabuse 1991) and whether there is an association between motivation, improvement across skills, and the students’ engagement with PT after a short period of instruction. The analysis suggests certain patterns indicating the value of PT, although further longitudinal research and qualitative analysis will offer us sounder indicators of the correlation between attitudes and motivation, and inverse PT and language learning on FL students.

3.3 Case study design and description of the questionnaire

The self-report questionnaire (see Appendix 1) reveals the overall attitudes of the students towards inverse translation. The questionnaire, completed after a semester one annual module, is in line with the implementation of a task-oriented approach. The questionnaire includes questions that look at key issues like the teaching materials employed, the skills developed, and the content covered, all through the students’ perceptions. In practical terms, the questionnaire is developed around four areas and seven questions. The distribution of the four areas is based on the synergy between them: (A) the students’ previous experience with translation; (B) the students’ attitudes towards translation; (C) the students’ improvement in Spanish through translation; and (D) the students’ opinion on the practice of translation. Each area of the questionnaire focuses on a different variable and includes open and closed questions designed to elicit detailed information through qualitative and quantitative analysis. The questionnaire, which

was specifically designed for this exploratory study, complies with the scientific standards set out by Neunzig and Tanqueiro (2007) and with Reid's standard of "norming" (1990: 324), guaranteeing its transferability (if applicable) to future studies. The questionnaire is presented in English and includes questions about opinions, beliefs and judgements, the responses to which can be used to analyse and identify trends in foreign language learning through translation (Gillham 2000: 26).

The first section (A) looks at the students' previous experience and whether they have a similar background in translation – that is, whether they have any experience in translation during the first three years of their BA, if so what kind, and if this experience is similar to the translation they encounter in the final-year module in question. Sections B and C explore the students' perception of translation (looking at whether they like or dislike about PT), and the effort (or lack thereof) invested in the module. A correlation between attitude and effort will reveal whether students feel that the translation module that has been part of their academic degree programme has led to an improvement in their proficiency in Spanish, and if so what kind of improvement this has been. Students can classify their improvement based on a number of categories (vocabulary, grammar, socio-cultural knowledge) and language skills (aural, oral, reading, and/or written skills). Section D elicits students' opinions about whether translation is a necessary or useful part of their degree. In this section, students comment on the difficulty of the texts used, the appropriateness of the focus on grammar, and whether translation (in this case English to Spanish) should be part of the curriculum.

Variables in the questionnaire are therefore related to attitude and motivation. Motivation is associated with improving competence in different language and translation skills, as well as enhancing commitment to learning Spanish as a FL. The questionnaire will also help to show how motivation may relate to other aspects – namely the students' attitude to this practice, their interest in it, and their expectations of it as a valuable practice.

4 Results and discussion

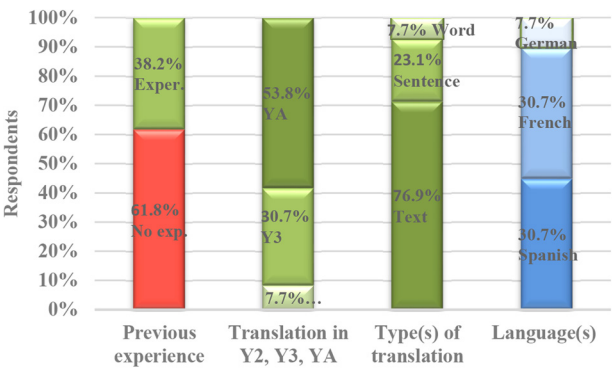
4.1 Section A. Previous experience with translation

Section A looks at whether students have had previous experience with translation in years one to three of their degree; where they do, it explores if their experience is

relevant to the module in final year. The results of these correlations, which do not take into consideration directionality (that is, whether the translation is direct/inverse), are as follows.

- a. 61.8% of the students had never done translation in university before their final year; the remaining 38.2% of the students had previously done some translation – between English and Spanish, German or French, as some participants study more than one language in their BA.
- b. None of the students with prior experience in translation had gained this experience in year one; 7.7% had experience with translation in year two, and 30.7% gained it in year three; 53.8% of the year three students had done translation during their Erasmus year in a university abroad. Reports from students who did translation in their second or third year indicate that 76.9% worked with texts; 23.1% with sentences; 7.7% with words (vocabulary).
- c. Of the 38.2% of students who reported having previous experience, 30.7% had worked with Spanish, 30.7% with French, and 7.7% with German; 30.7% of the participants who did translation before the final year did not specify which language they worked with.

Table 2: Students’ experience with translation.



Results show significant disparities in the participants’ experience. Most students did not do translation before their final year, and the experience of those who did revealed that their experience with translation had been rather diverse. Interestingly, 61.5% of those participants with previous experience in translation claimed that the translation exercises done in earlier years were similar to those in final year (See Table 2).

The data gathered illustrates a diverse student profile and a wide range of experience with translation. This diversity does not necessarily appear to be negative, as according to the analysis it is reasonable to believe that different levels and types of experience in translation may not have such a powerful effect on the students’ attitude – or even on performance – as had initially been believed.

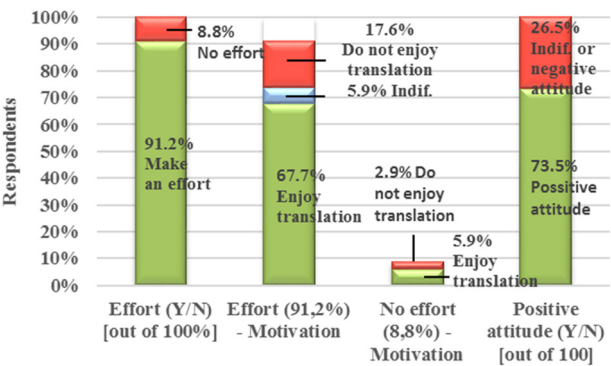
4.2 Section B. Students’ attitudes, motivation and effort

Section B explores how attitudes, motivation and effort are related by examining the extent to which the students’ enjoyment (or otherwise) of translation and the effort expended on it function as indicators of attitude.

The data show that students’ attitude towards translation was generally positive. Of the 91.2% of the participants who claimed to be making an effort on the translation module, 67.6% enjoyed translation, 5.9% were indifferent, and 17.6% claimed that they did not enjoy translation.

The ratio of students who did not make an effort in translation was very low (8.8%), although this does not necessarily mean that those students disliked translation. In fact, 5.9% enjoyed the activity but they did not need to make an effort, while only 2.9% related the lack of effort to their aversion to translation, i.e. they claimed that they did not make an effort because they did not enjoy translation. This indicates that 73.5% of the participants had a positive attitude towards translation.

Table 3: Students’ attitude towards translation.



As such, translation is perceived not only as a motivating skill, but also as a skill in which students invest a lot of effort, which seems to lead to an improvement in language competence, if we take it that motivation and success are closely interrelated (Samimy and Tabuse 1991). This is supported by the fact that although 61.8% of the students were practicing translation for the first time in their final year, most of them enjoyed the subject and admitted to exerting themselves at it if the effort was needed. In all, participants shared a positive attitude to the use of translation in language teaching: despite a general lack of experience, and the fact that these students needed to invest time and effort in this component, their overall approach was constructive.

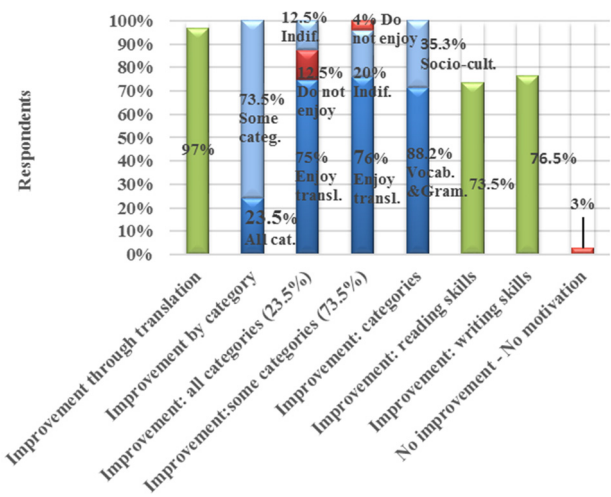
4.3 Section C. Improvement: Analysis of the impact of translation on language categories and skills

In this section students reflect on those categories where they can identify an improvement in their linguistic and cultural knowledge of Spanish as a result of their translation work. A total of 97% of the participants acknowledge an improvement in their level of Spanish: 23.5% claim an improvement in all categories, while 73.5% indicate an improvement only in certain categories. Of these, 88.2% feel that their vocabulary and grammar have improved, and 35.3% sensed an improvement in their socio-cultural knowledge of Spanish. This suggests that attitude and improvement are interrelated:

- a. of the 23.5% who claim an improvement in all categories, 75% enjoy translation, 12.5% are indifferent to it, and 12.5% do not like translation;
- b. of the 73.5% who claim an improvement in only some categories, 76% enjoy translation, 4% are indifferent to it, and 20% do not like translation;
- c. only 3% of the participants who do not enjoy translation do not claim any improvement at all through the work they have done on this module.

When the students look at the traditional language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) most respondents feel that translation improves their reading skills (73.5%) and writing skills (76.5%), while feelings of improvement in listening and speaking are negligible (and on this account they have been omitted from the table below), a result that could be expected given the written nature of the translation tasks.

Table 4: Students’ improvement and motivation.



4.4 Section D. Students’ opinions

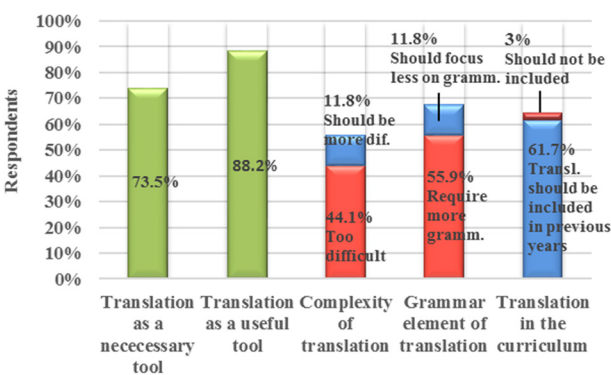
The final section of the questionnaire explores whether students find translation useful and/or necessary in the curriculum and their general perception of translation. Data reveal that 88.2% of the participants considered inverse translation to be a useful tool while 73.5% deemed it to be a necessary part of their degree. This, together with the information elicited in the previous sections, indicates that translation in the final year is highly valued by the vast majority of the students.

This section includes questions that examine the students’ views on specific aspects of the translation module they completed: (a) the difficulty of the texts; (b) the amount of grammar involved; and (c) whether translation should remain on the curriculum. While 30 to 40% of the participants do not expand further their views on these aspects, indicators among the answers suggest why participants find translation useful and why it should remain part of the Spanish curriculum.

- a. Translation is a key in improving the students’ performance, despite the complexity of the texts used in the class: a significant number of participants (44.1%) considered the texts to be too difficult while 11.8% thought that the level of difficulty could be increased.
- b. 55.9% of the participants suggested that a greater focus on grammar in the translation module would be beneficial, while a much lower 11.8% felt that the translation classes should focus less on grammar.

- c. Finally, only 2.9% of the students thought that translation should not be included on the curriculum, while there was general support (61.8%) for integrating PT in their degree before the final year. This shows that participants perceived translation to be an appropriate tool for learning Spanish and that it should be practiced more thoroughly.

Table 5: Students’ opinions.



4.5 The impact of translation on learning Spanish: Mark distribution

Final-year students take four different annual modules (i.e. 13 weeks per semester) on Spanish as a FL: literature, text analysis, oral skills, and translation (inverse translation that is L1 to L2 in semester one, and direct translation that is L2 to L1 in semester two). The modules are independent and each accounts for 25% (making a total of 100% of the students’ marks in Spanish). Although the data gathered in this case study reveal a generally positive perception of inverse PT, analysing and discussing the distribution of marks across the various modules will provide a fuller insight on translation not only in relation to the students’ attitudes, motivation and effort, improvement and opinion, but also in terms of performance.

In the first place, Table 6, which illustrates the marks allocated across all the different components in Spanish, shows that there are indications that the inverse translation component may be more challenging than other components. As we can see, while the highest mark is in line with other modules, the average and lowest marks for translation are significantly lower than they are for the other subjects.

This trend is even more noticeable in Table 7, which looks at the number of passes and fails in translation. To pass any of these modules students needed a

Table 6: Distribution of marks – average/highest/lowest marks.

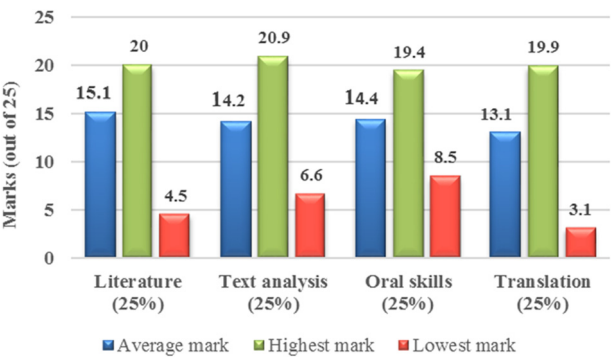
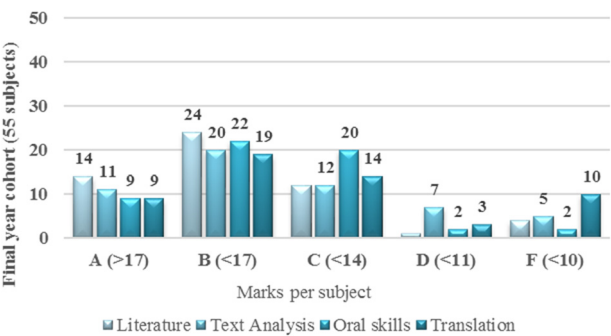


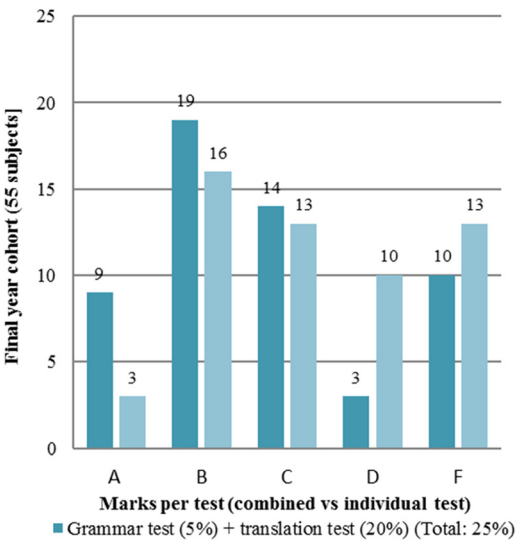
Table 7: Distribution of marks: pass/fail.



mark of 12 or above. Anything below 11 is considered a fail. As we can see, fails increased up to 80% in translation when compared to other components, such as oral skills.

A hypothesis that would explain this trend is that many students do not practice translation before the final year and, as a result, they find it more arduous than other components like oral skills, reading comprehension, and literature. In addition, students translating into their L2 may have had an impact on the higher incidence of lower marks for this module when compared to others. These hypotheses become more plausible when we look closely at the exams that are in place in the translation module: a grammar test worth 5% and an inverse translation exam worth 20%. Performance on both assessments, illustrated in Table 8,

Table 8: Overall results in the translation module (25%) versus the translation test (20%).



shows that marks dropped significantly in the translation exam, where 41.8% of the cohort failed translation (obtaining D and F marks).

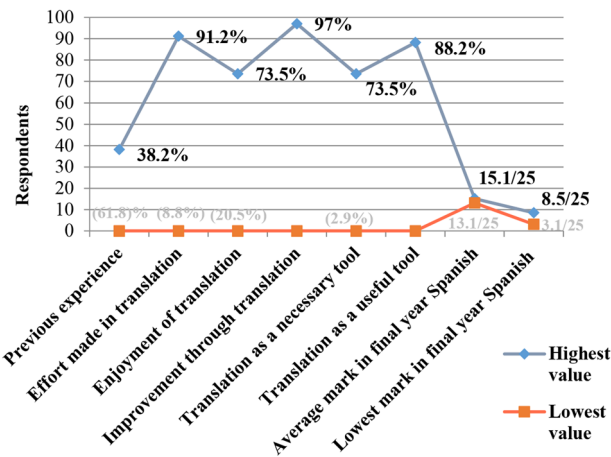
5 Discussion of the case study

This case study demonstrates that inverse translation can be challenging for students and that there are still issues with the overall inclusion of translation in FL curricula in university language degrees. The first of these issues may be the lack of gradual implementation of translation in the FL curriculum in (at least) some institutions in Higher Education in Ireland, and also a lack of planning or pedagogical implications – that would explore, for instance, whether inverse translation should be followed by direct translation rather than the other way around, particularly when students have not formally done any type of translation in previous years in the degree. In this particular case, practice with translation prior to the final year and the type of translation experiences varied significantly amongst students. These factors can have serious implications for how students (but also teachers) may approach translation in FL. The results obtained from this cohort reveal that translation not only has the lowest marks and the lowest

average, but also the largest number of fails compared to other language modules. Having said that, translation was perceived as a motivating subject in which, participants made an effort, felt they had improved in one or more areas and language skills, and which most participants deemed to be a necessary and useful tool. Even if the analysis of the data here reveals a rather challenging landscape for PT, students still rated translation highly. This overall picture, which is not without its contradictions, is symptomatic of the curricular problems facing pedagogical translation, problems relating to whether translation should be introduced into the curriculum and, if so, when and how. However, the value of this study lies in the fact that it reflects a real-life educational scenario and genuine student insights into PT. We can therefore presume that the observations made here may also reflect tendencies prevailing in other university departments and institutions.

It is worth pointing out that participants seemed to identify translation as a communicative activity rather than an isolated exercise developed primarily for the purposes of working on grammar and syntax: 80% of the students who had previous experience of translation reported having translated texts (which means that they did not associate translation with working at word or sentence level *only*). In addition, there is a visible connection between attitudes towards translation, the effort invested in this module, and the benefits reported – that is, whether participants felt that they had improved in Spanish through the translation practice (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 9: Correlation between core contextual and perceptual aspects.



Other interesting results can be found in Tables 9–11. Table 9 shows correlations between aspects relating to the students’ background (previous experience or lack thereof) and perceptual aspects on key elements of the case study (effort, enjoyment, improvement, and perception of translation as necessary or useful). In essence, despite the lack of previous experience, the rates on enjoyment, effort and improvement that students experience through translation are rather high – particularly the latter with 97%. In other words, students believe it is worth their while investing time in inverse translation. The average and the lowest marks for modules in Spanish in the final year intend to give an overall view of the gap between these values – which captures in some measure the quintessence of this study.

The correlation between previous experience and the perception of translation as useful and/or necessary (Table 10) shows that almost 90% of the participants found the translation module to be valuable (see Table 5), despite the fact that most of the respondents were unfamiliar with translation. A vast majority of those participants with previous experience valued translation as both useful (92.3%) and necessary (84.6%); the figures for participants with no experience are slightly lower: 85.7% saw translation as useful, and 66.6% thought that it was necessary.

The correlation between attitude, effort and improvement in language skills (Table 11) reveals that all participants who liked translation improved in one or more specific area(s) or skill(s). In all, 76.6% of the participants who liked translation felt that their proficiency in Spanish improved in one or more aspects. Even participants who did not like translation or were indifferent to it (23.7% in total) reported an improvement thanks to translation. An isolated 3% revealed a dislike for translation, a lack of effort, and no development.

Table 10: Experience / translation: useful – necessary.

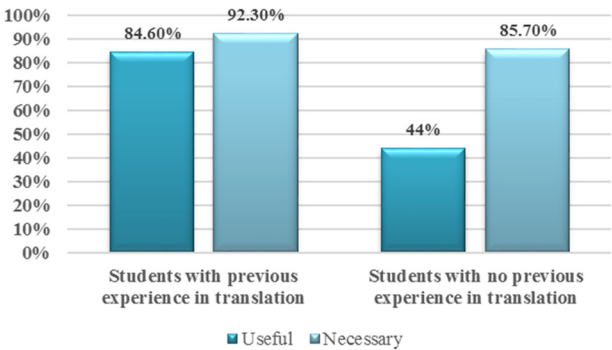
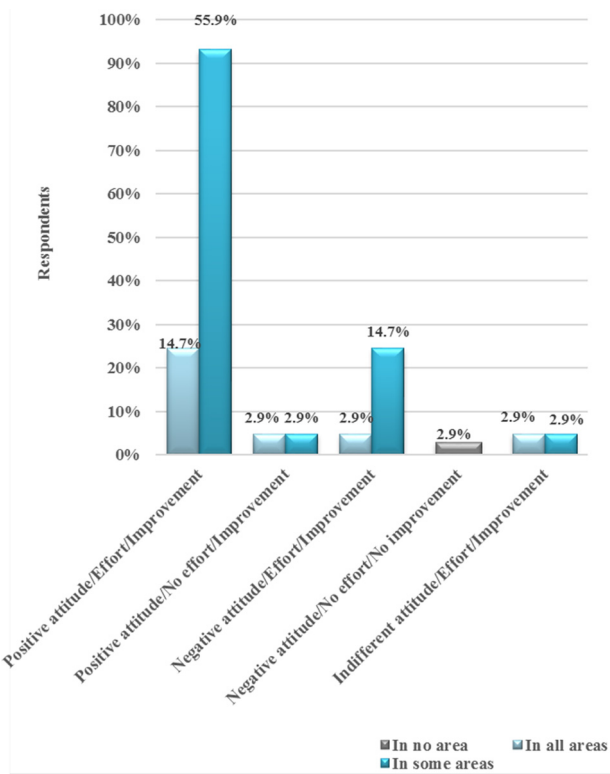


Table 11: Correlation between attitude, effort and improvement.



The tendencies analysed show that while translation is perceived as a useful module, those who had some previous experience of translation may find it more useful, and thus rated it higher. Also, and as illustrated in Table 11, having a positive attitude towards translation and putting good effort into it will naturally determine how useful this element is to students. Student attitude is also an indicator when related to previous experience: both attitude and previous experience are central to the development of competences and skills in Spanish. Vocabulary and grammar seem to be the “winning elements” where students report a bigger improvement, probably due to the fact that language teaching has traditionally emphasised the importance of these elements, or that students still identify grammar as a central aspect of translation (Table 4). In relation to the skills, the participants referred to an improvement in their reading and especially in their writing skills.

The final section of the questionnaire, which explores the correlation between previous experience, complexity of texts, focus on grammar and adequacy of the translation practice, raised issues that were somehow unpredicted.

1. Students would prefer to work with easier texts; this trend is surprisingly stronger among participants with previous experience (61.5%) than those with no previous experience (33.3%) as one would naturally expect that students with more experience in translation would prefer to work with more complex texts.
2. A difference on the focus of grammar in translation is obvious: 66% of the participants with no previous experience in translation are inclined to work more with grammar, in comparison with 38.5% of the study group who had previous experience. This shows that those in the first group probably rely more on grammar and neglect pragmatic aspects that engage with socio-cultural issues.
3. 61.8% of the participants appeal for translation courses to be better integrated into the curriculum. Data shows that this tendency is more important among students who do translation in the final year for the first time (66.7%), while only 53.8% of the study group with previous experience would support this. These results may act as guidelines as to how translation in FL teaching may be best implemented.

Overall, a large proportion of the participants consider translation to be beneficial, even though there is a desire for a stronger focus on grammar and the use of less challenging texts. The issues related to grammar and text complexity are probably connected with the language difficulties students' encounter. Nonetheless, according to this study the students' attitude and effort have the greatest influence on student predisposition towards PT. Ultimately the results indicate that translation comes across as a valued practice that has a positive effect on language learning.

6 Concluding remarks

This case study aimed to find out more about students' attitudes towards inverse PT and students' agency. The results provide a fresh insight into the role of translation in the foreign language curriculum and the nature and the specific context of the study may be used as a reference in future research. The data and the follow-up analysis suggest a positive outlook for PT. However, since this initiative emerged in response to the need to nurture a more informed discourse about PT

that takes stock of students' opinions, pedagogical praxis, and the curriculum, the conclusions call for future measures:

- a. to re-conceptualise the framework in which translation is considered in the foreign language curriculum;
- b. to develop sound pedagogical praxis that will validate PT (direct and inverse) in the classroom and its acceptance by teachers and students;
- c. to replicate the translation process in the FL classroom and, in accordance with this, to describe the competencies and the skills that the language student already has and those that s/he needs to develop;
- d. to create a communicative space in which to build a model of inclusion for PT in the curriculum; and finally;
- e. further empirical research on the teaching of (inverse) PT that explores the combined insight of PT from the teacher and the students' experience(s) and takes them into account in formulating future policies and developing curricula in foreign language teaching.

Current lines of research and classroom practices do not appear to be consistent at present, and there seems to be a gap between practitioners and theorists (Kelly and Bruen 2014: 16). The students' perceptions reported in this study, and supported by other studies such as that of Carreres (2006), are generally positive. However, these studies also identify a number of issues – namely TILT or PT being identified with the teacher-centred grammar translation method; a general lack of concrete suggestions as to how to design and implement in-class activities, and guidance from the literature; and insufficient empirical research. For these reasons, I suggest that PT requires further research to guarantee that its implementation is attuned to pedagogical praxis and I hope that this exploration will encourage future examination of this issue.

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Bionote

Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez

Dr. Lucía Pintado Gutiérrez is Assistant Professor in Spanish and Applied Linguistics at Dublin City University, Ireland. Her research explores the developing field of language education and pedagogical translation, in particular the principles on how translation may be utilized as a tool in foreign language, and how it may be developed as a skill for the benefit of FL learners. Her interdisciplinary research includes aspects related to foreign language teaching and learning, translation pedagogy, and learners' motivation and agency. A second strand of her research lies at the intersection of translation and memory studies. She has published and co-edited work in both areas.