

“No news is good news?”

The role of feedback in the virtual-team-style translation production network

Akiko Sakamoto and Melanie Foedisch

University of Portsmouth, UK / University of Manchester, UK

Professional translation is now predominantly carried out in virtual-team-style production networks where communication between language service providers (LSPs) and freelance translators' practice is increasingly restricted to computerised methods. Although some literature deals with interactions between different participants in the translation production network, little attention has been paid to the ways in which they exchange feedback on translation products. Using observation and interview methods, this article examines how feedback is perceived and dealt with by freelance translators and LSPs' project managers. Our results suggest that, although both groups share the value of feedback to some extent, feedback does not always reach translators and the translators are not always aware of the rationale behind it. By drawing on the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman and Oldham 1980), which was developed in organisational psychology, we argue that incorporating feedback in the job constructs of freelance translators' work may help to enhance translators' motivation.

Keywords: feedback, translator, project manager (PM), translation practice, motivation, interview study, workplace observation, Job Characteristics Model (JCM)

1. Introduction

Nowadays translation production is predominantly carried out in a “virtual team” style production process, involving freelance translators (Rodríguez-Castro 2013). In this work model, members of a translation project “do not work together at the same physical location, but [...] collaborate across geographic, national, temporal, cultural and/or linguistic boundaries” (Stoeller 2011, 290). The aim of the present study is to empirically investigate how feedback is handled in such professional

translation environments and discuss its significance and implications for the practice of translation. To this end, we define feedback as a written or oral comment generated by a user, a client or a representative of a language service provider (LSP) about one or more of the following items: (a) the quality of a translation product delivered by the translator; (b) the translator's competence; and (c) the translator's level of professional service. This article particularly concerns feedback-related interactions between in-house project managers (PMs) and freelance translators who are based outside the LSP. Scenarios in which translators work for direct clients or as in-house translators are not covered in this article.

Feedback to translators in the translation production process, particularly in a virtual-team-style production workflow, is an understudied area in translation studies, possibly because providing feedback to translators is a post-delivery process and is not generally considered as part of a translation production process. However, the value of feedback should not be underestimated, particularly for the purpose of enhancing motivation (for reasons we will discuss in Section 4).

Following a literature review (Section 2), the present article draws on relevant data from two studies: Sakamoto (2014, 2017) (henceforth study 1) and Foedisch (2017) (study 2). Study 1, in which 17 translators were interviewed, highlights that they tend to believe that "no news is good news" when it comes to feedback, i.e., they believe that the translator does not receive any feedback when the PM and the end client are happy with the translation product (Section 3). In Section 4, we will compare this perception against data from study 2, which investigated PMs' views on this matter. In light of this comparison, and by drawing on the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman and Oldham 1980) from organisational psychology, we discuss in Section 5 the significance of feedback in the translation production process and its implications for translators' practice, and particularly for translators' motivation.

2. Feedback in the translation production process: What we (do not) know

Apart from studies on feedback in the assessment process in pedagogical situations (e.g., Neunzig and Tanqueiro 2005; Washbourne 2014), literature on feedback to translators in professional situations is sparse. In the limited body of literature, feedback is often seen as a management tool for facilitating and improving the workflow and productivity of PMs' work, rather than as help for translators. This is particularly the case in localisation-related literature, where feedback is almost exclusively perceived as communication between the translation buyer (end client) and the LSP. For example, in Dunne and Dunne's *Translation and localization*

project management: The art of the possible (2011), which provides a collection of prescriptive documents about localization project management, the topic of feedback is not indexed but is dealt with under the terms “post-mortem” and “lessons learned”. Several contributions to this edited volume (Dunne, K.J. 2011; Lammers 2011; Stoeller 2011; Zounourides-Lull 2011) explain that it is standard procedure in project management to document problems experienced in the project as well as recommended solutions and to share them with the project team so that PMs can consult the document to identify possible future risks. Zounourides-Lull (2011, 92) advises that PMs “should prepare a lessons learned document” and “reward team members for working on the project”, but whether “the team” includes freelance translators who are located outside the office in the virtual-team-style production network remains unclear. As an exception, K. J. Dunne (2011) highlights the importance of incorporating more than one delivery stage in a project so that in each stage the team (and the translator) receive formative feedback from the client (162–163), but he concedes that “the adoption of incremental and iterative approaches seems to be exception rather than the norm in translation and localization project management” (168–169). According to the localization literature, translators seem to become visible in the translation production process only when they make a mistake, and success is not treated as an opportunity for learning.

This tendency in localisation project management guidelines is confirmed by Drugan’s (2013) empirical study on translation QA models. Drugan reports that some QA models used by LSPs incorporate in their production process a stage where they seek post-job client feedback. However, the purpose of such a production stage is often to update resources such as translation memories, and the provision of feedback to translators tends to be limited to occasions where the translators are in-house employees or when the translation projects deal with high-risk and sensitive contexts with a large budget to spend. As a result, freelance translators rarely have access to client feedback and, according to Drugan, this is one of the reasons why translators tend to prefer working for a direct client bypassing an LSP (136).

One notable aspect in the discussion of feedback in literature is the worrying disregard of translators, which is also evident in the discourse of the industry regulator. The international standard that sets out the requirements for translation services, ISO 17100 (British Standards Institution 2015, 11), has a subsection (6.1) under Section 6 “Post-production processes” designated to “feedback”, which requires LSPs to “have a process in place for handling client feedback, for assessment of client satisfaction, and for making appropriate corrections and/or taking corrective actions”. However, in terms of conveying feedback to translators, ISO 17100 only recommends to “share feedback from the client with all the parties

involved” as “good practice” (11). It is, again, not clear whether or not these “parties involved” include freelance translators.

The apparent disregard of the issue of feedback to translators in industry literature does not mean, though, that the handling of feedback is negligible or is neglected in actual practice. Quite contrarily, intricate treatment of feedback is reported in Olohan and Davitti’s (2015) workplace study of two UK-based LSPs. By using workplace observation and interview methods, the study revealed the complex yet dynamic process of trust management between the PMs and their clients and freelance translators, illustrating that feedback plays an important role in the trust-management process. Examples of practice include PMs’ efforts to mitigate harsh criticism from an end client by re-wording it in constructive and amiable language and by carefully choosing the method of communication (email, telephone, etc.) to suit individual translators. Koskinen (2009, 104–105), in her ethnographic study of translators in the EU, also reports an example of good practice of the Finnish translation division, which implemented a change in its work procedure so that the translators (though in this case staff translators, not freelancers) receive regular and direct feedback from the users of translations; this change enhanced the level of job satisfaction and motivation of the translators. These study outcomes are proof that industry guidelines do not cater for all relevant and important aspects of project management such as how to use feedback as an effective means of improving both the PMs’ and translators’ motivation and work performance.

However, these kinds of empirical studies are still limited and there is clearly a gap in knowledge regarding feedback in translation practice. We believe that feedback to translators is important for translation practice, particularly for the purpose of enhancing translators’ motivation (for the reasons we discuss in Section 5), which can influence not only the translators’ practice but also that of PMs. With an aim to shed more light on feedback with multifaceted approaches, the next two sections present some empirical evidence on this issue from the perspectives of two groups of translation stakeholders: freelance translators and PMs.

3. Feedback: Translators’ views

3.1 Study 1

Translators’ views on feedback were examined by analysing the discourse of 17 professional translators with a language combination of English and Japanese (the working languages of the researcher). Their discourse was collected in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. The interviewed translators were eight British

and nine Japanese nationals who were based in the UK (except for one who was a British translator based in Switzerland but working for UK-based LSPs). Each interview lasted between 10 to 120 minutes (depending on how many stories they could offer) and the total recording time of the interviews was 957 minutes. All interviewees were successful translators who were in much demand in the market as measured by the average number of words they translate for remuneration every week (ranging from 5,000 to 16,700 English words or equivalent) and by the number of enquiries for availability they receive from existing or prospective clients (on average seven a week, ranging from 1 to 20). Ten of them had experience of working both as freelance and in-house translators and seven had worked only as freelancers. Interview data covering their experiences of working as in-house translators is excluded in the current study. Although there is a limitation in the language combinations of the interviewees, we assume that the data is valid to examine the current mainstream environment of the UK translation industry due to the high commercial presence of the interviewees. These participants will be referred to with their identifier numbers in square brackets ([Interviewee 01 ... 17]) in this report.

The original purpose of the study was to examine how translators justify their translation decisions (for detailed methodology, see Sakamoto 2017). The study participants were asked the questions: “Have your clients ever had disagreements/issues with the quality of your translation? What did they say to you and what did you say to them?” In answering these questions, the interviewees reported occasions on which they had received negative feedback from a PM about the quality of their translation, either as judged by the PM or the end client. They then explained how they justified their translation to the PM by explaining why they had translated in that way. Overall, 93 stories were collected, of which 36 accounts concerned situations where the translator was working as a freelancer and a PM was involved in the handling of the dispute. In the present study, we will draw on only these instances.

3.2 Negative feedback

In 36 of the stories, the participants said that negative feedback was given because the client or the PM had one of the following opinions about the translation in question: the style of the translation was not appropriate (14 cases); the translation was not accurate/mistranslated (8); the translation did not observe domain conventions, e.g., terminology (8); there were omissions in the translation (2); the PM found at a later date that the translation was already available on the internet but the translator did not report that (1); the translator took too long to translate

it (1); the character count the translator claimed was inaccurate (1); there were too many translator's notes with questions (1).

Their accounts then developed in either of two ways: they amended the translation according to the initial negative feedback, or they did not amend it but instead explained to the PM how and why the end-client or the PM was wrong about the negative feedback. These developments of accounts were analysed using a Narrative Inquiry approach, identifying how the translators structured their accounts. In Narrative Inquiry, a field of qualitative study of psychology and the social sciences, the structure of narrative is believed to be revealing as we can observe how the speaker organises their experience, i.e., what the world is about for them (Sarbin 1986). What was particularly revealing in this study was the way the translators ended their stories, as they provided some kind of assessment as to whether their claim was vindicated or not and in doing so, they provided the reasons which we will describe in the following section.

But before that, it would be important to add that the interviewees were not completely negative about the experience of receiving negative feedback. Although it can be an antagonising or upsetting experience for translators, they also see the benefit of its serving as an "interesting learning curve" [Interviewee 14], giving them a chance to obtain information about "end-clients' preferences" [02] or "a lot of guidance" on how to translate [03]. Even when they do not agree with the negative feedback, they find it "interesting to see how other people deal with the same problem in the text" [14], which is valuable in a profession where one tends to work in isolation, like a freelance translator who is part of a virtual team. The interviewees also highlighted that the value of feedback as a learning tool is particularly high if the PM takes a positive and constructive attitude towards feedback, perceiving it also as an opportunity for themselves to "improve together" [14], handling the issue on "an equal level" [16] with the translator, investing sufficient time to deal with it [03]. On these occasions, feedback seems to create a good rapport between translator and PM.

3.3 (Lack of) positive feedback and its alternative indicators

Although the participants were only asked explicitly about negative feedback, they volunteered information about positive feedback, or lack of it, too. Such information was offered at the end of their stories, when they provided an assessment as to whether their claim was vindicated or not. In explaining how the dispute with the PMs ended, they stressed that translators rarely receive positive feedback and, as a result, they are left in the dark about the quality and acceptability of their translation.

- (1) Interviewee: I went through the whole thing one more time, made a few more changes and ...

Interviewer: And was he [the PM] happy?

Answer: I never heard another word from him [laughs].

[Interviewee 14]

- (2) I've never been told exactly what the end client said about the matter. And, you know, the agencies keep that to themselves in my experience.

[Interviewee 07]

- (3) I normally don't see any of these changes. Because once a freelancer has done their job, and has produced the initial translation, the translation then gets sent on to a desktop publisher, an editor, whatever. And most of the time I never see it again. And so I have no idea what changes they've made to anything I've done.

[Interviewee 11]

And when the translator does not receive final feedback after the delivery of a translation, they seem to understand it as a good sign:

- (4) I wrote back to the agency as he suggested and basically [they said] 'OK, thank you. We'll tell the client' and that was that. I never heard any more from them so very relieved.

[Interviewee 04]

- (5) It [feedback] didn't come back to me. Sometimes they come back again, but this one didn't. So my assumption is that the proofreader agreed with me.

[Interviewee 14]

According to the translators, another indicator of successful translation is subsequent commission of work from the same LSP:

- (6) They [the LSP] still gave me work after that, so it was not a big issue.

[Interviewee 01]

- (7) I didn't hear anything after that at all. It was a final email. I sent that final email and I never heard another word about it. But I have subsequently had offers of work from that agency so I didn't conclude that they were, you know, completely furious with me.

[Interviewee 07]

The translators also used remuneration for translation assignments as a judging criterion for the success of their work.

- (8) [I]t took many hours to do this (to explain about the translation quality), but once we had done that, the client accepted it and they paid us the full fee.

[Interviewee 01]

Sometimes both indicators, subsequent commission and remuneration, were reported:

- (9) And anyway, I didn't hear anything more about that job whether they were satisfied or not. But I got paid very quickly and they turned out to be a very good client actually. I got more jobs from them. Thankfully no more [laughs] funny queries.

[Interviewee 04]

However, these judgements do not seem to go beyond guesswork. The translators are only indirectly inferring whether or not the translation they delivered was of appropriate quality through the signs of either not receiving any feedback, receiving repeated commissions or receiving remuneration. We find this lack of positive feedback worrying and worth investigating. Therefore, we examine PMs' perspectives on this matter in the next section to arrive at a balanced view on this issue.

4. Feedback: PMs' views

4.1 Study 2

Data related to the PMs' view on feedback was collected as part of a research project on practices in project management (Foedisch 2017). The PMs' view was assessed by analysing data collected through non-participatory workplace observation of five PMs and one vendor manager (VM)¹ and subsequent interviews with four of the PMs and the VM in an LSP in the UK. The PMs and the VM were observed on nine non-consecutive days over a period of six weeks. Throughout the observation, fieldnotes were taken, and a thematic analysis was conducted of the data. Themes that emerged from this analysis were discussed in more depth during the interviews, and feedback was one of those themes. The interviews took place in social areas of the company, away from the PMs' and the VM's desks. The interviewees were asked how they deal with feedback on translations (positive and negative) and what kind of feedback clients usually provide. Subsequently, the interviews discussed whether it is important for the PMs to forward feedback to translators, their opinions on the value of translators receiving such feedback, and how this process is handled.

At the time of fieldwork, the participants had between 0.75 and 26 years of work experience in the translation industry, with a median of 4.5 years. They had worked between 0.6 and 7 years for the participating LSP, with a median of 1.75 years. In what follows, the PMs' and the VM's identities are noted by pseudonyms.

1. As the VM worked closely with the PMs, mainly in terms of recruiting translators and selecting translators to work on projects, she was included in the study sample.

4.2 Three sources of feedback

Our data suggests that feedback about translation quality is generated in three different ways: two from internal sources and one from external. The first internally generated feedback is for the purpose of translator assessment to monitor their performance over time and to ensure that translators consistently produce translations of good quality. The VM routinely commissions some of the LSP's experienced freelance translators to assess randomly chosen translations of the translators who work with the LSP on a regular basis. This process generates quantitative measures of the translators' performance. The LSP regularly commissions work to those who have achieved high scores. Negative feedback resulting from this assessment is always passed on to the translators to provide them with an opportunity to learn and improve, whereas positive feedback is not necessarily forwarded, although positive reinforcement would certainly be useful.

The second kind of internally generated feedback comes from a systematic bilingual checking of translations, during which in-house proofreaders check and, if necessary, amend the translation. In contrast to the above procedure, which is coordinated by the VM, this one is carried out as part of the PMs' day-to-day business. It is more limited in terms of the language combinations checked, as the proofreaders can check only a limited number of languages. In addition, these checks do not primarily aim at monitoring the performance of an individual translator but are carried out to ensure quality across the translation projects which are handled by the LSP. Not all translations are subject to this process, and selection depends on the availability of proofreaders and their ability to check a specific language pair. It should be noted that the process is part of the LSP's quality assurance procedures, and thus no additional fee is paid by the client. However, it is to the client's benefit, and is also advertised as such. The LSP offers this procedure as one of their services, and logs feedback resulting from this process in their in-house database. Such feedback is not usually shared with translators. Using measures of translator performance and product assessment, the LSP accumulates feedback about their translators in their in-house database, and PMs use this information when they select translators for their projects.

Finally, feedback may be obtained from end clients. The PMs reported that they tend not to receive any feedback (either positive or negative) from their end clients. If they do, most of the feedback comes in the form of a complaint.

- (10) Nine out of ten times you will hear nothing.
[Karolina]
- (11) Usually, you only hear from clients when they're not happy.
[Colin]

PMs regard the handling of complaints as a necessary part of project management. Complaints may carry financial implications, as the LSP may be required to give a discount on the translation fee or refund a paid-up fee. Once such a complaint is lodged, the PMs first check its validity.

- (12) [The clients] come back and say: 'It's not very good.' And then we have a strict procedure to follow. When we have such complaints, we review them in house if possible. We ask the translator to review their work as well but then we also ask an independent person to look at it.
[Karolina]

This "independent person" is usually a translator who was not originally involved in that translation project. According to the PMs, this standard procedure often reveals that complaints are not justified.

- (13) I would say, a good proportion of negative feedback that we get is something that's not really justified. (...) If we get bad feedback on a translator that we believe have done (...) good work, we still share that information (...) we say there was absolutely nothing wrong with the translation.
[Karolina]

If the end client's claim seems to be legitimate, the PMs may decide to draw on the expertise of additional translators to evaluate and resolve claims even though this may incur additional costs. In this case, the original translators are confronted with the issue "because you need to have a discount, some money back from them to cover the costs of the other translators' feedback" [Sophie]. Apart from insignificant or illegitimate feedback (e.g., if the client's feedback concerns preferential changes), all feedback is forwarded to the translator with a request for amending the translation accordingly.

There are, however, some cases in which negative feedback is not passed on. Provided that it does not have a benefit for either party, for instance, when a translator had stepped into the breach by accepting highly urgent projects and then made a mistake, the PMs may decide that passing on such feedback could be detrimental to their relationship with the translator.

- (14) If it's someone who we work with lots, and they have taken a lot of work for us, I think there might be some sort of mitigating circumstances.
[Colin]

Such feedback may still be logged in the LSP's database, so it can be taken into account in future translator selection.

Passing on negative feedback is by no means a simple, automatic process. Negative feedback may be moderated before it is passed on to the translators in

order to maintain good work relationships. This is usually done by the VM, who is responsible for dealing with the translators in the database.

- (15) You get some feedback from a client so you're just passing that on to the translator, but they might (...) take offence by the fact that the client made changes and things, so it's just about wording it really carefully, so that they understand why you're sharing that information with them and why those changes were made.
[Emily, VM]

Finally, the PMs regard negative feedback as an opportunity for the translators' professional development, a view which is shared by the translators in study 1.

- (16) From a translator point of view, you just want them to learn from it really, and to make sure it doesn't happen again in the future.
[Colin]

The PMs' accounts illustrate that they clearly recognise the stress and anxiety that feedback may cause their translators, but they also regard feedback as useful for their translators' professional development and, as a result, the PMs deal with feedback carefully in their day-to-day practice.

Positive feedback from end clients

The value of positive feedback for the translators' professional satisfaction is also recognised by the PMs:

- (17) The ultimate reward for translators is when the client says: 'Brilliant!'
[Sophie]
- (18) I think everyone likes to be recognised for their work. It's really nice to pass it on, I think. It builds the morale of the person that's done it and it motivates them, I guess, to produce the same quality of work.
[Karolina]

As was mentioned earlier, however, positive feedback from end clients is extremely rare. The frequency of receiving positive feedback also depends on the PMs' relationship with the client:

- (19) If it's a client or contact person that I've a good relationship with, they'll get back to you just to let you know that [their] office is quite happy with these translations.
[Colin]

In addition, whether or not positive feedback is passed on to the translator seems to be a matter of prioritising. The PMs work under constant time pressure (which

became evident in the observation) and admit that they often do not have time to forward all feedback. Although PMs recognise its value for translators as positive reinforcement, passing on positive feedback seems to be of low priority and does not form part of their work routine.

Our data, however, indicates that the translators' efforts do not go unnoticed. In the LSP under study, positive feedback is logged in the database too, which was observed during our study. PMs log information as to what kinds of texts or subjects the translator performed particularly well, and the accumulated information is shared between the PMs for selecting translators to work on specific projects.

- (20) Emily [VM] prepares a weekly mailshot (to in-house PMs) to say: 'Look, we've had excellent feedback on this translator.' So, that (...) helps us to get to know people that we perhaps never heard of and we are wondering whether to use them on the next projects.
[Karolina]
- (21) Good feedback might promote a translator to become Supplier of the Week. (...) It also gets documented in the supplier folder. If you have a project (...) from a new client, and you're not sure which translator you want to use for it, you could look in the translator folder.
[Colin]

However, this information sharing is solely for in-house purposes and it is not shared with translators. For instance, the Supplier of the Week scheme, which flags high-performing translators in the in-house database, gives translators visibility only among the PMs who may select them for their projects.

4.3 Repeated commission and remuneration

The translators' assumption that repeated commission is an indicator of client satisfaction was confirmed by a PM in her comment:

- (22) I guess you can reward the translators by keeping on using them (...) even [if] they don't necessarily realise you are using them because you like them and you like their style, because you haven't had any problems with them.
[Sophie]

However, another indicator the translators suggested, i.e., remuneration, was not mentioned in the interviews with the PMs. This may be because of the sensitive nature of the topic.

4.4 Tackling the problem of lack of feedback

An interesting point revealed by study 2 was a strategy used to compensate for the lack of feedback. PMs are aware that end clients tend to keep feedback about translation projects to themselves and suspect that no news is “not necessarily a good thing” [Karolina]. To reduce the uncertainty about their clients’ satisfaction with the delivered translation products, the LSP sometimes follows up with their clients to establish if they were satisfied with a translation. The purpose of this strategy is twofold: first, to increase client satisfaction and the chances of future commissions, and second, to improve the quality of the LSP’s future translation service:

- (23) It’s actually a good way to get to know your customers, what kind of things they look at. If they have very specific feedback, you can say that there is a pattern to things they change. Perhaps we can incorporate it into a style guide or if they seem to be using very specific terms, we can put that into a glossary as well.
[Karolina]

The PMs occasionally seek feedback proactively from clients because they feel feedback is beneficial for their own professional development. Although both the PMs and the translators admit, separately, that their respective clients tend to give them feedback only when they are not satisfied with their translations, this proactive attitude of the PMs is noticeably different from the passive attitude of the translators in study 1, who, according to the data collected in study 1, submissively assume that receiving no feedback indicates satisfactory work.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 No news is not necessarily good news

The two studies reported above have shed light on what has been visible and invisible for translators regarding feedback by PMs. The comparison of their views suggests that the translators’ belief that “no news is good news” is generally correct. PMs treat negative feedback seriously and systematically because they recognise the necessity of forwarding negative feedback from end clients so that translators are given a chance to justify their translation quality, and make amendments to the translation, if required. PMs also believe negative feedback provides translators with a good learning opportunity (a view which was shared by the translators in their interviews). Above all, end clients tend not to express their positive feedback to the PMs to begin with, particularly when the PM has a weak rapport with the end client, and therefore positive feedback often does not exist in a recognisable

form. If it is not recognisable for the PM, it is natural that the translator does not receive it.

Even if the PM appreciates the translator's work, this appreciation may not reach the translator. In-house procedures of translator performance and product quality assessment are mainly used for monitoring and documenting purposes, and serve as a procedure of quality assurance. While negative feedback is dealt with as part of project management, positive feedback is treated as something extra, which often receives less attention when PMs are busy. In addition, PMs believe that repeating commissions to translators is an effective way of rewarding translators, thus clear expression of appreciation of work may not be offered.

However, evidence suggests that the translators' "no news is good news" belief is sometimes incorrect, particularly when feedback is processed without the translators' knowledge. PMs may choose not to forward negative feedback to translators, or moderate the tone of the feedback in order not to damage their relationship with the translators.

Having reviewed the outcomes of studies 1 and 2, what seems to be particularly worthwhile noting is the way the LSP's internal database is used. What was observed in study 2 is clearly in line with what localisation project management literature often recommends. PMs log positive and negative feedback about their translators in their internal database, share the information with fellow PMs (and the VM) and use it in the translator selection process in future projects. In addition, negative feedback gets processed as part of project management, particularly when there are financial implications (the LSP may end up not being paid for the work done), but positive feedback seems to be handled unsystematically, often being affected by contingent factors such as the personal relationship of PMs and end clients or depends on how busy the PMs are. As a result, positive feedback does not always reach the translators who would otherwise benefit from it as a motivation enhancer, as we will discuss below. Translators' behaviour is recognised in terms of "lessons learned" in the LSP's database and the value of positive feedback is undermined. There seems to be an imbalance in the degree of values PMs attach to positive and negative feedback. As a result, translators are unwittingly left in the dark about how their translation was received by the LSP and their end clients.

5.2 Feedback as a motivation enhancer in job design

In order to discuss the implications of the above findings for the work practice of translators and PMs, we now draw on Work Design Theory from organisational psychology, more specifically, the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) (Hackman and Oldham 1980). The advantage of the JCM in the present context is that it allows us to interpret feedback as a construct of the translator's job, rather than a stage of

translation project management (as localisation project management literature recommends). In other words, this model allows us to posit that PMs are in an influential position where they can motivate their freelance translators by designing their translation jobs in such a way that the translators will strive to deliver high quality translation because they are highly motivated to do well. We argue that providing feedback (good or bad) to translators is important for reasons we explain below.

Work Design Theory holds that good person-job relationships are vital for improving the effectiveness and quality of work because a suitably designed job motivates the worker (in our context, the translator). It maintains that work should be structured in such a way that it is performed effectively and, at the same time, jobholders find the work personally rewarding and satisfying. In other words, motivation of the worker and their subsequent performance have more to do with how tasks are designed and managed than with the personal dispositions of the people who do the job. When people are well matched with their jobs, their work motivation, and consequently their performance, is high.

Hackman and Oldham stress the importance of feedback, both positive and negative, for the motivation of workers.

When someone has high internal work motivation,² feelings are closely tied to how well he or she performs on the job. Good performance is an occasion for self-reward, which serves as an incentive for continuing to do well. And because poor performance prompts unhappy feelings, the person may elect to try harder in the future so as to avoid those unpleasant outcomes and regain the internal rewards that good performance can bring. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of positive work motivation powered by self-generated (rather than external) rewards for good work. (1980, 71–72)

Based on this belief, the JCM posits that high internal motivation occurs on the job when the worker feels three psychological states. First, they must have knowledge of the results of their work. Second, the person must experience responsibility for the results of the work. And finally, the person must experience the work as meaningful. These three psychological states are fostered by five core characteristics of the job. Knowledge of results is materialised by the first characteristic, *feedback* (i.e., how much feedback the worker receives about his/her work effectiveness). Increased responsibility is fostered by the second characteristic, *autonomy* (how much independence and discretion the worker has in carrying out the job). And meaningfulness is achieved by the rest of the three characteristics: *skill variety* (how much variety of skills and talents the job requires of the worker in carrying out the job), *task identity* (to what degree the job requires the worker to complete the whole

2. Hackman and Oldham use the term 'internal motivation' (1980,72) in a similar sense as what is more generally known in psychology as "intrinsic motivation" (Deci 1975).

job, i.e., doing the job from beginning to end with a visible outcome) and *task significance* (how much impact the job exerts on the lives of other people) (77–80).

Generally speaking, it would be fair to say that a translator's job meets the job characteristics of *skill variety*, *task identity* and *task significance*. Professional translation requires a high level of diverse skills including linguistic skills, specialist knowledge of the field covered by the text as well as technological skills (such as use of CAT tools), as argued by, for example, PACTE (2005) and Göpferich (2009). This should count as *skill variety*. A translator, as a freelance contractor, is expected to accomplish the entire process of text production, from receiving a source text, carrying out necessary research, producing a target text, proofreading the text and delivering it to the PM as a finished product. This should count as *task identity*. In addition, a translator knows that a client is in need of the translation (that is why they are paying for the translation) and they can guess how the translation they produce impacts on their lives because, to produce the translation, they read and understand the content of the translation (although they are not allowed to disclose the content to a third party). This should count as *task significance*. Considering the standard work conditions of a freelance translator, it would also be accurate to say that a translator's job has the core characteristic of *autonomy*: the translator is an outsourcing contractor and their autonomy in scheduling the job and determining the work procedure is taken for granted.

In contrast, the outcomes of studies 1 and 2 have shown that the job characteristic of *feedback* is often lacking in the translator's job, suggesting that the translator's knowledge of results is not always materialised. As a result, according to the JCM, the translator's internal motivation is hampered. Consequently, this may damage the future quality of their work. In light of the JCM, it would be reasonable to argue that redesign of translators' work in such a way that feedback is provided to the translator in all situations will improve the level of motivation of the translator.

This can be said about positive feedback as well as negative feedback. Hackman and Oldham (1980, 100–101) warn against the risk of managers relying on their own perceptions of what is going on in the work situation, defining problems in terms of symptoms. When a worker's performance is poor, they tend to blame those who did the job. But these kinds of diagnosis tend to overestimate the “*person part of person-situation interactions*” (101, emphasis in original) and overlook the causes which are in the work situation, in this case, the work design. Diligently logging negative feedback about translators in the in-house database seems to be a sign of overestimation of the person aspect. A shift of attention from picking on translators' mistakes to enhancing translators' internal motivation to achieve a judicious mixture of both may help to improve the overall performance of freelance translators in the long run.

This change may be materialised at various levels in LSPs’ operations. First, it can be addressed at the personal level by each individual PM’s making an effort to forward both positive and negative feedback to their translators. This will require a conscious effort as, in the virtual-team-style translation production network, their communication with translators depends much on emails or the company’s vendor portal, where it is difficult to engage in spontaneous conversation and build a rapport, particularly if PMs are very busy. Second, the issue can be handled at the organisational level, where the concept of feedback as job construct will clearly become useful. If PMs are instructed by their management to incorporate the provision of feedback to translators in their project management, and if the company’s operational systems are designed to ensure that PMs will include feedback in the job package of the translator (in the same way as, say, they pay the translator at the end of the project), the translators will receive feedback regularly. In other words, receiving feedback is to be firmly integrated into the translator’s job constructs. This will help translators to learn from the mistakes they make and to be motivated by an appreciation of good work. At either level, this kind of effort will entail a work redesign of translators as proposed in the JCM.

Admittedly, as pointed out in study 2, providing feedback to translators is difficult if there is no feedback from the end client. This problem may be addressed in two ways. One way would be for the LSP to obtain feedback from the client in a more systematic way. This is actually what the PMs of the LSP studied in our study 2 said they do now: the LSP has recently implemented processes to tackle the issue by defining the collection of feedback from clients as a task of an LSP employee. This example illustrates that collecting feedback does not have to be solely a responsibility of PMs, but can be part of the job of other employees of the LSP. In addition, collecting feedback from the client is now a requirement of ISO17100, so it can be assumed that there will be a more concerted effort in the industry in this regard. The other way of addressing the lack of client feedback may be to generate feedback in house. If the PMs, or other employees of the LSP are capable of assessing the quality of translation work and have sufficient time to do so, the PM can, in theory, regularly give feedback to the translator.

5.3 The issue of feedback in the context of translation studies

The present article has narrowly concerned the issue of feedback for translators, with particular focus on its effect on translators’ motivation. The previous section proposed some ways of dealing with this issue based on the JCM framework. Feedback is, however, a form of communication between the translator and the user or commissioner of the translation. When looking at feedback in the wider notion of communication within the virtual-team-style production network, we

find that our concerns have been shared by some translation studies scholars beyond the notion of motivation. Key to this consideration is the aspect of social connections between actors of translation.

Risku et al. (2013) report that the increasing computerisation of project management, including the growing use of project management software for the purpose of standardising and streamlining production processes, has led PMs' jobs to lean towards "react(ing)" to different events by "clicking" on the screen "instead of adopting a creative approach" (42), and this tendency was also observed in our study 2. As a result, social connections between PMs and translators have been reduced and this new form of collaboration in the virtual-team-style work process, or what Risku et al. (2013, 44) call, using Shapiro and Varian's term, 'computer-assisted network economy', may ultimately influence translation quality.

Similarly, Rodríguez-Castro (2013) stresses the importance of communication workflow for the success of virtual-team-style production networks and the crucial role of PMs in facilitating that workflow although, in reality, the current work environments are characterised by "a lack of interpersonal relationships, a lack of face-to-face communication, a lack of social events to build trust, and a lack of close supervision" (39–40). The resultant effect on the translators is their marginalisation in the production network, which has been highlighted as a serious problem in the current translation industry (Abdallah 2010; Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Austerlühl and Mirwald 2010; Jääskeläinen 2007; Risku et al. 2013). The invisibility of translators in the production network also pose the risk of their lower social status and motivation (Dam and Zethsen 2008; Katan 2009; LeBlanc 2013).

In addition to providing a new perspective on feedback in relation to translators' motivation and LSPs' operational practice, we hope that the current article will contribute to the growing body of studies about translation production networks by adding a new feedback specific perception as well as empirical data collected from both translators and PMs. PMs in LSPs can contribute to improving the grim picture depicted by those scholars by communicating more regularly and directly with their freelance translators through translators' work redesign. In this context, we believe that feedback can play a vital and effective role, and that such use of feedback is important and desirable in the current translation industry.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their gratitude to the translators and project managers who generously took time out from their busy schedule to take part in this study.

Part of this study was supported by Toshiba International Foundation Graduate Research Studentship.

References

- Abdallah, Kristiina. 2010. “Translators’ Agency in Production Networks.” in *Translators’ Agency*, edited by Kaisa Koskinen and Tuija Kinnunen, 11–46. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Abdallah, Kristiina, and Kaisa Koskinen. 2007. “Managing Trust: Translating and the Network Economy.” *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs* 52(4): 673–87. doi: 10.7202/017692ar.
- Austermühl, Frank, and Christine Mirwald. 2010. “Images of Translators in Localization Discourse.” *T21N – Translation in Transition* 8: 1–44. <http://www.t21n.com/homepage/articles/T21N-2010-08-Austermuehl,Mirwald.pdf>.
- British Standards Institution. 2015. “Translation Services – Requirements for Translation Services ISO 17100:2015.” London.
- Dam, Helle V., and Karen Korning Zethsen. 2008. “Translator Status: A Study of Danish Company Translators.” *The Translator* 14(1): 71–96. doi: 10.1080/13556509.2008.10799250
- Deci, Edward L. 1975. *Intrinsic Motivation*. New York: Plenum Press.
doi: 10.1007/978-1-4613-4446-9
- Drugan, Joanna. 2013. *Quality in Professional Translation: Assessment and Improvement*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dunne, Keiran, and Elena Dunne, eds. 2011. *Translation and Localization Project Management: The Art of the Possible*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/ata.xvi
- Dunne, Keiran J. 2011. “From Vicious to Virtuous Cycle: Customer-Focused Translation Quality Management Using ISO 9001 Principles and Agile Methodologies.” in *Translation and Localisation Project Management: The Art of the Possible*, edited by Keiran Dunne and Elena Dunne, 153–87. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
doi: 10.1075/ata.xvi.09dun
- Foedisch, Melanie. 2017. *Managing Translation Projects: Practices and Quality in Production Networks*. PhD Thesis, University of Manchester.
- Göpferich, Susanne. 2009. “Towards a Model of Translation Competence and its Acquisition: The Longitudinal Study TransComp.” in *Behind the Mind*, edited by Susanne Göpferich, Inger M. Mees, and Arnt Lykke Jakobsen, 11–38. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur.
- Hackman, J. Richard, and Greg R. Oldham. 1980. *Work Redesign*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley.
- Jääskeläinen, Riitta. 2007. “The Changing Position of ‘the Translator’ in Research and in Practice.” *Journal of Translation Studies* 10(1): 1–15.
- Katan, David. 2009. “Occupation or Profession: A Survey of the Translators’ World.” *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 4(2): 187–209. doi: 10.1075/tis.4.2.04kat
- Koskinen, Kaisa. 2009. “Going Localised – Getting Recognised. The Inter-Play of the Institutional and the Experienced Status of Translators in the European Commission.” *Hermes – Journal of Language and Communication Studies* 42: 93–110.
- Lammers, Mark. 2011. “Risk Management in Localization.” in *Translation and Localization Project Management: The Art of the Possible*, edited by Keiran Dunne and Elena Dunne, 211–32. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/ata.xvi.11lam
- LeBlanc, Matthieu. 2013. “Translators on Translation Memory (TM): Results of an Ethnographic Study in Three Translation Services and Agencies.” *Translation & Interpreting* 5(2): 1–13.
- Neunzig, Wilhelm, and Helena Tanqueiro. 2005. “Teacher Feedback in Online Education for Trainee.” *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs* 50(4). doi: 10.7202/019873ar.

- Olohan, Maeve, and Elena Davitti. 2015. "Dynamics of Trusting in Translation Project Management: Leaps of Faith and Balancing Acts." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 46(4):1–26. doi: 10.1177/0891241615603449.
- PACTE. 2005. "Investigating Translation Competence: Conceptual and Methodological Issues." *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs* 50(2): 609–619. doi: 10.7202/011004ar.
- Risku, Hanna, Nicole Rossmannith, Andreas Reichelt, and Lukas Zenk. 2013. "Translation in the Network Economy." in *Tracks and Treks in Translation Studies: Selected Papers from the EST Congress, Leuven 2010*, edited by Catherine Way, 29–48. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004.
- Rodríguez-Castro, Mónica. 2013. "The Project Manager and Virtual Translation Teams: Critical Factors." *Translation Spaces* 2: 37–62. doi: 10.1075/ts.2.03rod.
- Sakamoto, Akiko. 2014. *Translators Theorising Translation: A Study of Japanese/English Translators' Accounts of Dispute Situations and Its Implications for Translation Pedagogy*. PhD Thesis, University of Leicester. <https://lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/29157>.
- Sakamoto, Akiko. 2017. "Professional Translators' Theorising Patterns in Comparison with Classroom Discourse on Translation: The Case of Japanese/English Translators in the UK." *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs* 62(2), 271–288. doi: 10.7202/1041024ar.
- Sarbin, Theodore. 1986. *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Stoeller, Willem. 2011. "Global Virtual Teams." in *Translation and Localization Project Management: The Art of the Possible*, edited by Keiran Dunne and Elena Dunne, 290–317. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/ata.xvi.15sto
- Washbourne, Kelly. 2014. "Beyond Error Marking: Written Corrective Feedback for a Dialogic Pedagogy in Translator Training." *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 8(2): 240–256. doi: 10.1080/1750399X.2014.908554.
- Zounourides-Lull, Alexandra. 2011. "Applying PMU Methodology to Translation and Localization Projects: Project Integration Management." In *Translation and Localization Project Management: The Art of the Possible*, edited by Keiran Dunne and Elena Dunne, 71–93. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi: 10.1075/ata.xvi.06zou

Authors' addresses

Akiko Sakamoto
School of Languages and Area Studies
University of Portsmouth
Park Building
King Henry I Street, Portsmouth PO1 2DZ
UK

Melanie Foedisch
University of Manchester
UK

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9801-7323>

 akiko.sakamoto@port.ac.uk
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9120-3089>