Comparative satisfaction among freelance and directly-employed Irish-language translators

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Abstract: This article reports results of a survey of government-accredited Irish language translators. The survey addresses a particular cohort of minority language translators in a particular linguistic context, where institutional demand for translation is growing. The survey may also be a useful basis for further work on translator job satisfaction. Participants in this survey were passionate about translation and about the Irish language, but conditions of employment clearly affected their concerns and perspectives regarding their profession. All translators report a strong sense of pride in their work, but freelance participants' perceptions of purpose and fairness in work, payment, colleagues, and job security compare poorly to those of their full-time public service colleagues. Freelancers report that they struggle to work together in the face of falling rates, with some accepting low-paying jobs that are against their own and their colleagues' best interests. Many of the freelance participants feel threatened by technology, the potential for machine translation to replace human translators, and their powerlessness regarding translations being repurposed for machine translation training. Responses show a fear of falling translation quality, a lack of translation talent, and the lack of an audience for translation. Participants tend to be negative about domestic Irish language policy but see policy at the EU-level to be beneficial, with forthcoming changes presenting an opportunity for skilled translators.

Keywords: Job satisfaction; status; working conditions; freelance work; precarious work; public service; professional translators

1. Introduction

Professional translation is a dynamic industry that has undergone huge change in recent years for two reasons in particular. Firstly, the employment model for translators globally has moved towards the vendor model, meaning that most translators are now employed on a freelance basis (Kelly, De Palma, & Hegde, 2012; Moorkens & O'Brien, 2017; Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, & Chan, 2012). Secondly, the technological requirements of the job have increased as translators are expected to use translation memory (TM) and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools to maximise consistency and to leverage previous translations (Lagoudaki, 2008). Within this context, a growing body of research has investigated translators' perceptions of their status (Dam & Zethsen, 2008, 2011; Ruokonen & Mäkisalo, 2018), either as professionals or in terms of the social status afforded to their role (Ruokonen, 2013), in general and as individuals. Results are mostly negative, with translators reporting disempowerment (Abdallah, 2012), low professional visibility (Dam & Zethsen, 2011), and low degrees of influence. Despite this, translators appear overall to be quite satisfied with their job in the few studies that measure job satisfaction (Courtney & Phelan, 2019; Dam & Zethsen, 2016; Rodríguez-Castro, 2016; Ruokonen & Mäkisalo, 2018).

The acute need for recruitment of Irish language translators over the coming years (see Section 3) makes it important to investigate job satisfaction among currently-working translators, who share many of the same concerns about the profession as those who work with other languages. This is relevant more broadly to the translation industry, which needs new entrants despite increasing automation (Moorkens, 2017). This study also offers an opportunity to compare freelance and public service employee translators' perceptions of job satisfaction. While previous surveys of job satisfaction as reviewed by Dam and Zethsen (2016) tend to be positive, in many cases measures are either vague (Katan, 2009; Setton & Guo Liangliang, 2009) or the research has been directed at interpreters rather than translators (Gentile, 2013; Tryuk, 2007). This survey aims to analyse a relatively small group of professional translators in more detail than in previous work, inviting open-ended responses to a series of positive and negative statements, within a research setting where the ratio of freelance to directly employed translators is unusually well-balanced. Job satisfaction results are enriched by a review of participants' perceptions of several major issues facing translators generally, such as pricing and translation technology, which must be considered when looking at the future of the profession. In the final results section of this article, we focus on the Irish language in particular, looking at the status of Irish within Ireland (where a minority understand the language) and the EU, and the potential for technological advancement.

2. Previous studies

Many researchers have written about the employment trend away from stable, linear careers to dynamic, 'boundaryless' careers (Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003), which may involve shifting between employers and a move away from "hierarchical reporting and advancement principles" (Arthur, 1994, p. 296). Accordingly, studies of job satisfaction and subjective career success, measuring workers' perceptions of their career success in affect-based research (focused on feelings and emotional responses to career success) or cognitive-based research (perceptions of whether their career is advancing as they would like) have become more common than studies of objective career success, such as salary or seniority, according to a meta-analysis by Ng and Feldman (2014). Guan, Arthur, Khapova, Hall, and Lord (2018) note that satisfaction rates for those in boundaryless careers are likely to differ depending on whether the lack of boundaries is voluntary, and whether the subject has a preference to work across organisational boundaries or to move between employers.

The translation industry appears to have a high prevalence of boundaryless workers. Pym et al. (2012, p. 88) estimate that roughly 75% of translators work on a freelance basis, and that the level of paraprofessional or "part-time remunerated translation activity is about 60 percent in general". Studies of translation workers have focussed largely on translator status rather than job satisfaction, usually delimited by country or market segment (Dam & Zethsen 2011, 2012; Katan, 2009, 2011; Ruokonen, 2013), with a meta-analysis published by Pym et al. (2012).

Ruokonen and Mäkisalo (2018) summarise the results of this work on translator status, noting the low status of the profession (or semi-profession[1]) and a lack of prestige when compared with interpreters and literary translators. Of most relevance to the current study, Dam and Zethsen (2011) compare three cohorts of Danish professional business translator: company worker, agency worker, and freelance worker, using parameters of education, visibility, salary,

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[1] Ruokonen and Mäkisalo (2018) report that translation fails to meet many of the criteria necessary to be called a profession.

and influence. Participants also provide their perceived level of occupational prestige, with company workers' results rated higher than the other two cohorts. Freelance workers rank poorly for salary rates, visibility, and power/influence, especially when compared with company workers (Dam & Zethsen, 2011). Dam and Zethsen (2012) hypothesise that Danish translators working in the European Commission and European Parliament enjoy a higher status than their domestic Danish colleagues, but do not find this to hold true in their survey responses. However, Cadwell, Castilho, O'Brien, and Mitchell (2016) find that the freedom for European Commission translators to work as they wish (as long as they maintain productivity rates) compares favourably with freelance colleagues.

Chinese translators and interpreters surveyed by Setton and Guo Liangliang (2009) perceived their occupational status to be equivalent to that of a university lecturer. Half of the respondents to Setton and Guo Liangliang's survey considered themselves to be satisfied with their job, and while more interpreters than translators appeared in the upper categories of 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied', more translators than interpreters considered themselves to be very satisfied.

Studies that focus particularly on job satisfaction in other fields will usually request responses to a series of statements within a survey in order to build a detailed picture of job satisfaction. Gattiker and Larwood (1986) built their statements around five factors: job success, interpersonal success, financial success, hierarchical success, and life success. Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, and Dullaghan (2015) focus on authenticity (autonomy and control), development, influence, meaningful work, personal life, quality work (i.e. providing a high-quality service or product), recognition, and general career satisfaction. Rodríguez-Castro (2015) created an instrument to measure translator job satisfaction, focusing on intrinsic task satisfaction, job satisfaction with regard to a person's perceived fit to their environment and with those at various levels within their work hierarchy. She tested this instrument in a survey with 250 respondents, discovering that intrinsic satisfaction was derived from "successful completion of projects, ability to perform a wide variety of tasks, and intrinsic pride in their work" (Rodríguez-Castro, 2016, p. 223). Respondents complained of tight deadlines and of clients who do not understand the localisation process. Job satisfaction was related to professional skills of co-workers and good client relationships.

Ruokonen and Mäkisalo (2018) and Courtney and Phelan (2019) investigate specific aspects of job satisfaction. The former study surveys literary, audiovisual, and business translators regarding satisfaction with rates of pay, negative stress, and whether respondents had considered leaving the profession. Respondents who perceive that their status is low tend to experience more work-related stress and consider leaving the profession more often (Ruokonen & Mäkisalo, 2018). Courtney and Phelan (2019) look at job demands, time pressures and workload in the context of job satisfaction. They conclude that translators, in general, are very satisfied with their work, but suffer occupational stress due to poor treatment from agencies and clients, issues with remuneration and self-employment, uncertainty about the future, and tight deadlines (Courtney & Phelan, 2019).

In more general surveys, such as the UK Translators' Survey (Chartered Institute of Linguists, 2017), 55% of 585 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they were optimistic about their future as a translation professional, although there were concerns about low rates, low-quality translation providers, and undercutting by inexperienced translators. 60% of 7414 respondents to the CSA-Research Survey (Pielmeier and O'Mara, 2020) expect to be working as linguists five years from now, and particularly appreciate the flexibility of hours, diverse work, and autonomy of translation. The CIUTI employability survey (Massey, 2018) cited price and income, productivity expectations, and under-

qualified competition as threats to the future of translation and interpreting. These themes appear in responses to the present survey in Section 6. The survey instrument evolved independently of the work by Rodríguez-Castro (2015), as described in Section 4, but there are some common topics, even though this study predated some of the more recent work on translator job satisfaction. This survey differs from most previous work, as it contains questions that elicit open-ended as well as scalar responses, and analysis compares employment types. The current work also looks in detail at fairness regarding pay and reuse of language data, and issues of social quality of translation processes, as defined by Abdallah (2012). It is also the first job satisfaction study, to my knowledge, that looks specifically at minority language translators. The context, regarding translation work in Ireland and the Irish language in particular, is introduced in the following section.

3. The Irish context

Across the EU, the average rate of standard full-time permanent employment is 59%, with employment in Ireland matching that average (EU Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2016). There is a move, globally and within the EU, towards contractual 'flexibility', driving an increase in temporary, part-time, and freelance work, with non-standard arrangements often grouped as atypical or contingent work (Gutierrez-Barbarrusa, 2016). Flexible employment in Ireland predates the 2008-2010 recession. Following the post-crash bailout of the GIPS countries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain), the International Monetary Fund pressured governments to ease employment protection rules in GIPS countries other than Ireland, which they considered sufficiently employer-friendly (Teague, 2016, p. 151). There was a rise in non-standard work in Ireland between 2008 and 2010 (along with a concomitant decrease in union membership), and while this levelled out, the rate of non-standard work post-recession is higher than beforehand (Kelly & Barrett, 2017). The unemployment rate in Ireland is 4.8% across all sectors at the time of writing, having peaked at 15% in 2012 (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2020; Kelly & Barrett, 2017). As Ireland is a world centre of translation and localisation (Schäler, 2003), translators in Ireland have experienced the move to the freelance vendor model as elsewhere. However, the proportion of freelance Irish translators appears to be lower than for those translating other languages, as many are public servants, directly employed by the Irish government due to the legal requirement that all legislation (drafted in English) be made available in Irish (Kenny & Cronin, 1995). Translators directly employed in the Irish public service are likely to enjoy greater job security and flexibility (in terms of working from home, working hours etc.) than those in the private sector (Russell, O'Connell, & McGinnity, 2009).

A language spoken by the minority of the population of a territory is usually considered to be a minority language, although Cronin (2003, p. 146) describes this status as highly dependent on political factors, and that the "hegemony of English" in the domain of technology means that all other languages are to some extent minoritised. As minority languages are particularly reliant on translation, he laments the absence of work on or in that topic in Translation Studies, and suggests that major languages have much to learn from the experience and responses of minority languages to "assimilationist translation pressures" (Cronin, 2003, p. 146). The situation for Irish language translators is complicated by the minority status of Irish, such that most people living in Ireland are unable to speak the language, even though

it is a compulsory subject in the school curriculum.[2] Irish translators work with a language in which all readers may be assumed to be bilinguals who choose to read in Irish rather than in English. However, the Irish language is also an official language of Ireland and, since 2007, an official language of the European Union (EU). The official status nationally means that it can be important to have an Irish-language version of texts for regulatory compliance reasons, although in some cases, perhaps for reasons of apathy and cynicism, these are created with minimal consideration of quality and value (Walsh, 2012). Despite the official status of Irish, there is a perception among many commentators that the language has been insufficiently supported by successive Irish governments. Ó Riagáin (2008) describes how government efforts since 1970 have tended to aim for maintenance rather than revival, with a focus on the small Irish-speaking *Gaeltacht* areas.[3] Up until recently, many EU materials were not translated into Irish due to a partial suppression or derogation on the status of Irish as an official EU language, initially until 2012, and then further extended to 2017. This derogation is due to be phased out by the beginning of 2022, which will require a leap in Irish language translation productivity. Output has more than doubled since 2016 in EU institutions, with a further doubling of volume anticipated for some institutions by 2022 (European Commission, 2019). The institutions have found Irish language translation and interpreting positions difficult to fill,[4] but the conditions on offer for new entrants who can achieve the standards required are likely to make the available roles for Irish translators enticing.

The European Commission (EC) is interested in leveraging as much previously translated material as possible, particularly using machine translation (MT), as part of the European Language Resource Coordination (ELRC). Irish is a computationally under-resourced language, and the lack of speech- and text-based resources means that the uptake of CAT tools among Irish-language translators has been slower than among those who work with major languages (Dowling, Cassidy, Maguire, Lynn, Srivastava, & Judge, 2015).[5]

Irish is a highly inflected verb-subject-object language, in which a word may change at the beginning, middle or end (Arčan et al., 2016), and in which the infinitive verb form is replaced by the verbal noun (Nolan, 2012). Although there is a standardised written form, regional dialects spoken in shrinking Gaeltacht areas are diverse, and in some contexts compete with the standard that was intended to supersede them (Kenny & Cronin, 1995; Mac Mathúna, 2008). As a result, Irish language MT quality has tended to be low, and due to the current lack of training data, initial experiments with neural MT have not yielded promising results (Dowling, Lynn, Poncelas, & Way, 2018), although more recent systems have shown improvement (Defauw et al., 2019).

Irish language testing and accreditation is managed by Foras na Gaeilge, a public body responsible for promotion of the Irish language and advisory on Irish language use and education since 2009. The relatively small number of accredited Irish language translators (210 at the time of writing[6]) presents a limitation to potential growth in translation activity. Despite the possibilities offered by increased MT use, recruitment of more Irish-English translators will

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[2] For a detailed history of the status of Irish in Ireland, and of Irish language translation, see Cronin (1996).

[3] Gaeltacht regions are those where the primary language of communication is Irish.

[4] A European Personnel Selection Office recruitment competition in 2018 targeted 72 English-Irish translators, but only found 15 suitable candidates (European Commission, 2019).

[5] The Irish parliament's in-house translators began to use CAT tools from January of 2018. Prior to 2016 it was also not common for public bodies to request TMs for future leverage when outsourcing translation. The government are due to publish their Digital Strategy for Irish in 2020 (Lynn, Ó Conaire, Dunne, 2019, 92).

[6] The list at https://www.forasnagaeilge.ie/about/supporting-you/seala/?lang=en comprises 72 full-time translators (including some retired) and 132 part-time as of June 2019.

be necessary in the coming years. With this in mind, it would seem to be an appropriate time to survey the opinions of currently accredited Irish language translators, in order to investigate perceptions of job satisfaction, along with the effects of technologisation on the profession and the influence of the EU on the Irish language. This should contribute to consideration of what may be done to attract new Irish language entrants to the profession.

4. Methods

The current survey was created using the Limeservice online survey tool and was divided into five sections. The first was biographical, the second section focussed on the current role of the translator, the third section related to Irish language policy at national and EU level, and the effects of technology on the language. The fourth section continued to focus on technology, the fifth section featured a series of questions about job satisfaction. A list of these indicative topics was submitted to and approved by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in Ireland, which part-funded the survey. Two colleagues reviewed survey questions and suggested minor amendments. The survey was tested internally, went live on August 9th, 2016, and was closed on September 1st. It employed the homogeneous cases sampling subtype of purposive sampling, which aims to gather opinions from people who are "demographically, educationally, or professionally similar" (Kemper, Stringfield, & Teddlie, 2003, p. 282).

One hundred and seventy-eight translators (all of those with email addresses provided in the Foras Na Gaeilge list of accredited Irish language translators from June 30th, 2016, 91 of whom (51%) are female) were requested to participate directly via email. Ninety-nine participants began the online survey, spending an average time of 26 minutes and 28 seconds on their responses. One additional respondent took part via telephone. While this response rate was positive, there was also a high attrition rate, possibly due to the length of the survey. Seventy-eight participants, 44% of those contacted, completed Section 1, 58 completed Section 2, and 52 completed all other sections. Thirty-eight of those who completed Section 1 identified as female and 39 as male (one participant chose not to disclose their gender). This gender balance is representative of the population of accredited Irish language translators, but is nonetheless surprising considering the general prevalence of female professional translators.[7]

The job satisfaction portion of the survey elicited responses to a series of 13 statements based on those from Gattiker and Larwood (1986) and Macey, Schneider, Barbera, and Young (2011), using a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree), but adjusted for the translation industry environment based on the research reviewed in Section 2. Four negative statements were interspersed among the positive statements in order to maintain attention on survey statements, a non-essential practice often employed in surveys and questionnaires (Jackson Barnett, 2000).

The statements are:
1. My work has a strong purpose
2. My employer's procedures and payment terms are fair
3. I feel isolated at work
4. I am proud of my work
5. My employer or manager understands what I do
6. I have no control over when, where and how I work
7. I enjoy completing a translation task

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[7] Pym et al. (2012) estimate that roughly 70% of professional translators worldwide are female.

8. I never have enough time for myself or my family outside of work
9. I work with good people
10. I have no job security
11. I receive constructive feedback on my work
12. I am compensated fairly for the work that I do
13. My work offers me an opportunity to be creative

Unlike many previous surveys, including ones carried out by the author, other portions of this survey mostly used open text boxes, allowing participants to write as much or as little as they wanted. Many participants took the opportunity to write long responses, which added richness to the results, although it also lengthened the process of coding and reviewing them. Coding took place within a spreadsheet tool, where grounded categories based on participant comments were applied in response to open-ended questions. Quantitative results are reported where appropriate to the question type, and differences are statistically significant where noted, based on an independent t-test carried out using SPSS.

5. Demographic Results

The cohort of participants in this survey is highly educated. In response to a question about their highest level of education achieved, 10 participants said that they have received a PhD or equivalent, 55 have Master's degrees, ten have a university or college degree, two received a postgraduate diploma, two a higher diploma, and one discontinued education after the Leaving Certificate (Ireland's final secondary school examination). Translation experience ranged from one to 47 years, with an average of 10.4 years and median of 10.0 years. This average was consistent among all participants and the freelance cohort (average experience for freelancers was 10.3 years). Post-editing experience ranged from none (26 participants had no experience of post-editing) to 20 years, with an average of 4.3 years and median of 2.0 years. For freelancers, the average was 4.3 years, median 2.5 years.
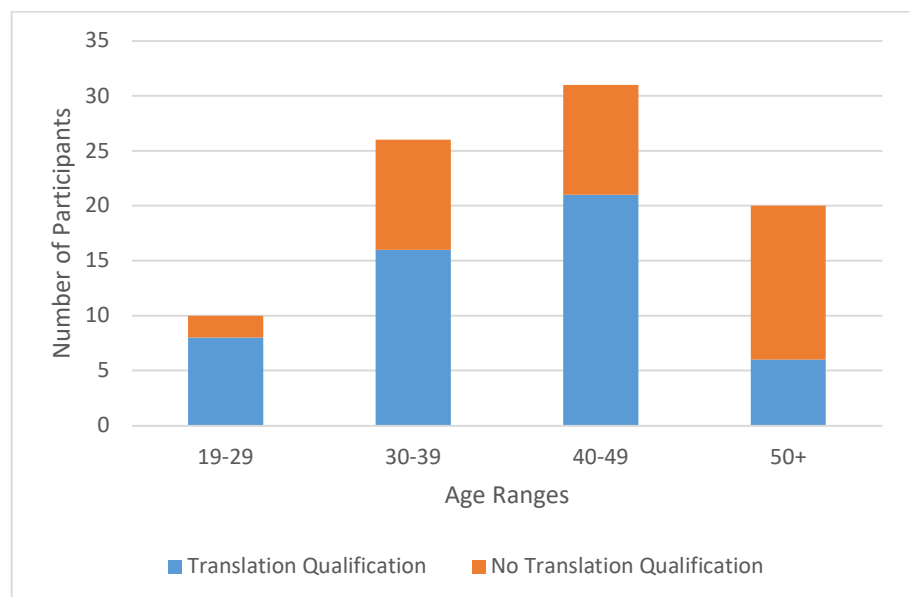

Figure 1. Age range of participants (with and without translation qualification)

As may be seen in Figure 1, younger participants were more likely to have an undergraduate or Master's translation qualification, with a rate of 80%

among participants aged 19-29 years old, and only 30% among those over 50. This may be related to the growth of translation as a field of study in recent years, and the belated introduction of Irish in university-level translator training in 1994 (Kenny & Cronin, 1995).[8] Amongst all participants who responded to the question, 42 had a degree (primary or Master's) in translation and 30 did not. 43 participants stated that they work as full-time translators, with 35 part-time. The categories were chosen by respondents without a clear definition for each role. My understanding of how they are constituted is as follows. Freelancers are sole traders who translate for one or more agencies as a subcontractor or 'vendor'. Self-employed are translators who may also subcontract work or work for direct clients, but rather than being sole traders, they may also employ others. Public servants are salaried workers for the public service who have gained the Irish-English translation accreditation and translate on a full- or part-time basis. Direct company employees are full- or part-time salaried translators with a private company. More details are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Employment status of participants (N=78)

Employment Status	Full-time translator	Part-time translator	Gender*
Freelance worker (more than one agency)	14	12	12M/14F
Freelance worker (single agency)	3	5	6M/2F
Public servant	14	3	7M/9F
Self-employed	6	6	6M/6F
Direct company employee	5	0	4M/1F
Other	1	9	4M/6F
Totals	43	35	39M/38F
	78		77

*One respondent did not answer this category.

Among the ten participants who chose the category of 'other', one works directly for a company and accepts freelance work, two work as freelance translators, two are recently-retired freelance translators, one works for the EU, three work in education (one tutor, one lecturer, and one post-doctoral researcher), and one works in a different field entirely.

6. Job satisfaction

This section was completed by 52 participants: 28 freelance translators (of whom 16 work in translation on a full-time basis, 12 work in translation part-time), seven self-employed translators (four of whom translate part time), eight full-time public servants (of whom six translate full-time and two translate part-time), three direct company employee translators, and six 'other'.[9] Participants were asked to respond to statements using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In the initial analysis of this data, I conflated freelance and self-employed respondents. This is commonly done (e. g. by McKeown, 2015; Stanworth & Stanworth, 1995), but in this data results

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[8] Translation has been taught at undergraduate level in Ireland since 1982 (Kenny & Cronin, 1995).
[9] The unequal rate of participation from each category of employment status and relatively small sample size means that few results are statistically significant.

are quite different. It may be that perception of their own agency among participants who chose the status of 'self-employed' is greater than those who chose 'freelance'.

The first statement was "My work has a strong purpose". Purpose and mastery are identified in the Job Satisfaction Index (Krifa, 2016, p. 3) as the two most influential factors on job satisfaction, which states that we "must be able to identify meaning and purpose… in order to achieve happiness at work". The average response in this survey was 3.87, which suggests a positive sense of purpose, although there was a statistically significant difference between public servants (4.25) and freelance translators (3.68). The average score for the self-employed cohort was 4.14, whereas company employees averaged 3.33. Comparative results may be seen with standard deviation bars in Figure 2.
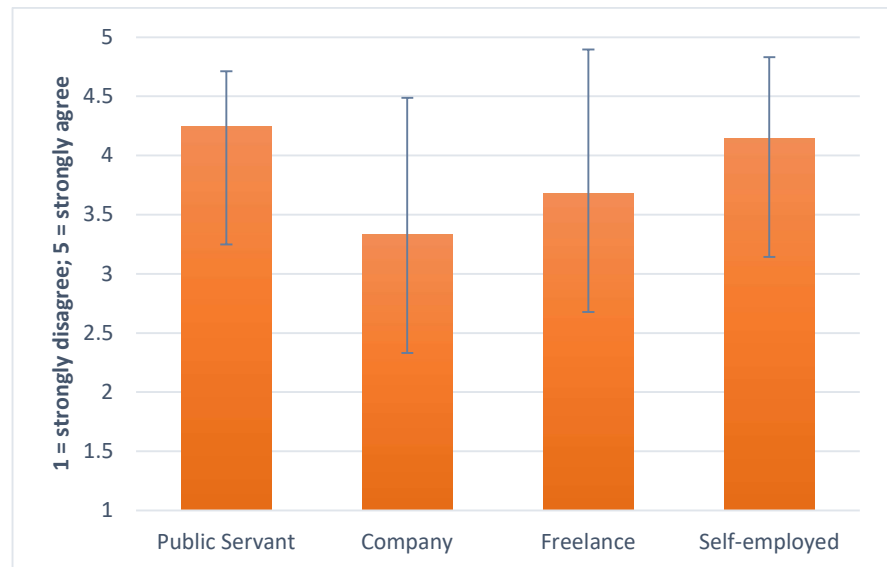

Figure 2. Mean response to the statement "My work has a strong purpose" (N=52)

A further discrepancy based on working conditions was noticeable in the responses to the statement "My employer's procedures and payment terms are fair". The average response of 3.42 could be broken down to freelance (3.07, although with a standard deviation of 0.9), self-employed (3.28), and company employees/public servants (both 4). Again, the difference between freelance and public service employees was significant (p=0.001 using a t-test for equality of means). The perception of fairness, or the "perceived fairness of decision-making processes" (Bies & Shapiro, 1988, p. 676), is an important factor in the employee-employer relationship (Macey et al., 2011), and trust has been identified as key for job satisfaction (Krifa, 2016) and essential in translation production (Chesterman, 1997).

Many freelance translators have complained of disempowerment with regard to working conditions and payment terms (Abdallah, 2012; Belgian Chamber of Translators and Interpreters, 2018; Courtney & Phelan, 2019; Kelly et al., 2012), so the significant difference between freelance and full-time public service responses (p=0.011) to the statement 'I am compensated fairly for the work that I do' was expected. The average response was 3.23, with public servants (3.88, with standard deviation of 1.0) and self-employed translators (3.57) responding more positively than company employees (3) and freelance translators (2.82, with standard deviation of 1.1).

All participants reported a tendency to 'feel isolated at work', with an average rating of 2.71. This fits with the impression Dam and Zethsen (2008) report from their review of literature. One may have expected freelance

translators to respond strongly to this statement, considering reports of freelancers having fewer professional contacts than company translators (Dam & Zethsen, 2011), but Jemielity (2018) has noted how in-house translators are often isolated from other groups within a company environment, with a growing trend for freelancers to work remotely but cooperatively. Of the six participants who chose 5 (strongly agree), five are freelance or self-employed translators. However, the highest average score (3) was for public servants. Among responses to this survey, there was mention (from a part-time freelancer) of "translators working in isolation, which may not suit everybody". Another freelance part-time translator wrote that "I've been actively moving out of the career for some time now. Isolation of self-employed working from home [was] literally killing me, as was RSI and stress related to tight deadlines and the cut-throat market."

Similar feelings of disempowerment are evinced in response to the statement "I have no control over when, where and how I work", with an average response of 2.5 (freelance/self-employed 2.65, public servants 2.75), although company employees strongly disagreed with this statement, with an average response of 1.33. Dam and Zethsen (2011) found that company workers tended to be empowered by greater visibility and influence as part of their role. While freelance workers agree to an extent that they have 'no job security', rating 3.18 on average, the three direct employees who completed this section (rather surprisingly) either agreed or strongly agreed (average 4.66). Public servants feel secure in their roles, with an average of 1.75 differing significantly from that of freelance respondents ($p=0.015$). This may be seen in Figure 3.
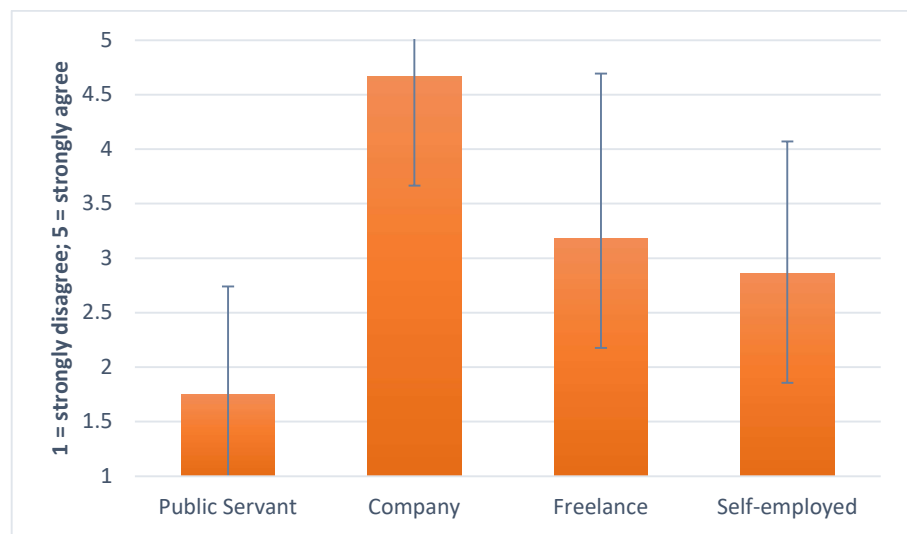

Figure 3. Mean response to the statement "I have no job security" (N=52)

Translators do tend to be 'proud of their work', however, with an average rating of 4.21 (freelance/self-employed 4.08, public servants 4.38, company employees 4.67) showing that they want to create quality work that they can feel pleased with. The Job Satisfaction Index (Krifa, 2016) identifies pride as the top motivating factor for workers. Participants also enjoy completing a translation task (average 4.17 comprising an average for freelance of 3.96, company employees 4.33, public service 4.38, and self-employed 4.86).

Company employees particularly feel that they work with good people with an average overall of 3.67 comprising an average rating of 3.40 from freelancers/self-employed that differs significantly from 4.25 from public servants and 4.33 from direct employees ($p<0.001$). With an average response of 3.69 consistent among different categories of worker, most translators appear to agree that their employer or manager understands what they do, but

respondents do not appear to receive constructive feedback on their work.[10] Company employees appear most likely to receive feedback (3.33 from an overall average of 2.67: freelance 2.68, public service 2.75), whereas self-employed (1.57) appear unlikely to, perhaps due to working directly with clients or large language service providers.

On average, translators did not agree that they 'never have enough time for myself or my family outside of work', with an average of 2.52 roughly consistent for different forms of employment (ranging from 2.78 for freelance workers to 2.25 for public servants). Individual respondents who ranked themselves as 4 or 5 on this scale were not all negative about their work or future prospects. For one respondent, this was due to taking on translation work while working full-time on something else. Freelance work appears to offer a greater 'opportunity to be creative' (average 3.37: freelance/self-employed 3.48, employees 3) than work in the public service (2.88).

The perception of freelance work tends to be more negative, as may be seen in the comment from a full-time public servant "I think freelance translators have a hard time of it at the moment… there are so many of them, and the majority of companies don't really care about the quality of the translation, so are willing to give the work to whoever charges the least". The average response to positive statements was 3.59, with a freelance average of 3.40 and a public service average of 3.83. Freelance participants also had higher average ratings for negative statements with 2.87 as opposed to 2.44 among public servants.

Not all freelance translators consider that their situation is negative. Some mentioned the freedom of freelance work, and one full-time freelance translator wrote that "there will be a bright future in Ireland for Irish translation. I have had to increase my turnaround continuously since 2010 and it's showing no signs of decreasing."

7. Issues facing translators

From the 54 responses to the question 'What do you consider the main threat to the profession of translation?', the main themes were falling quality (27 responses), low rates (23), and MT (or, as one self-employed translator called it "software which will replace us"; 11). Six participants used the term "race to the bottom" in terms of prices and quality. Among freelancers (31) and self-employed translators (7), the main concerns were price (18), quality (13), and unscrupulous agencies (10). Seven freelancers expressed worries about the use of MT. The ten public servants who responded to this question were most concerned with low quality (5) and MT (4). One freelance translator complained of "agencies aggressively lowering rates and winning huge contracts so they can corner the market and pressure translators into accepting ridiculous rates". Another freelance translator cited rates "as low as €0.05 per word", and a company employee suggested that "rates are lower per word in 2016 than 2005" – a point made elsewhere by do Carmo (2018), who suggests that per-word translation rates internationally have not kept up with inflation.[11] Some public servants have sympathy for the difficulties faced by freelance colleagues. One "would imagine that, as a freelance translator, it is much more difficult to earn a living now. In the public service, I don't think too much is changing. Different translation memories, but continually improving."

Discussion of quality tended to corroborate the lack of care as reported by Walsh (2012; see Section 3). One self-employed participant complained that

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[10] There is no indication whether those that employ freelancers are direct clients or agencies.
[11] For example, data for the UK (see link) shows the 10-year producer price inflation rate for translation and interpreting services from 2008-2018 to be 2.8%, compared with 9.4% across all services. https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/k8xi/sppi

there "isn't much of an emphasis on quality, with the cheapest translator getting the job, regardless of ability". Four participants complained of what one (a university researcher) respondent called "unqualified translators and those willing to undercut". One self-employed participant blames a "shortage of good Irish translators" that has meant "more time is spent sorting out assignments poorly performed by unqualified translators". Participants felt that the downward pressure on price is having an effect on quality, and that "the bottom line seems to be price rather than precision and experience" (freelance full-time translator). "Big companies have secured much public work but have very low standards", another part-time freelance translator wrote.

When asked specifically about attitudes to MT, responses were mixed, with 15 positive comments and 22 negative comments (16 from freelance/self-employed translators). Participants cited problems with register and said that MT is only useful for gisting or for major languages. Therefore, one public servant said, it is "not useful for Irish, seeing as anyone who speaks Irish also speaks English". "They don't need gisting, they require good idiomatically sound translations, if at all". Few participants appear to use MT at present, and many seemed to confuse MT with translation memory. A self-employed part-time translator wrote that MT "is a help to the translator rather than a replacement for human effort. A public servant wrote that "there's a place for it in the future of translation with the understanding that post process editing will always be required."

Regarding post-editing, 12 commented positively (including 7 freelance/self-employed and 5 public servants), 15 were negative (13 freelance/self-employed, two public servants), and many did not understand the concept. A self-employed translator wrote that "it slows my workflow down by about 10-15% and also results in a poorer, more stunted translation" (this has not been backed up in most research studies, although that of Gaspari, Toral, Kumar Naskar, Groves, and Way (2014) does show mixed results). Some participants complained that post-editing is "tedious" and "a thankless task, in every way". One felt that it is associated with heightened productivity expectations, where employers "required us to post-edit too many words per hour".

Several comments about MT and post-editing related to perceptions of quality and "texts becoming too standardised". "It will further dilute the language", wrote one freelance translator. "It will not be effective. Language is a HUMAN activity not a machine activity", wrote another.

In response to the question as to whether it is "fair to use the work of translators for training MT engines", 17 answered yes, and 16 answered no. "It is inevitable", wrote one, "fairness is a different matter". One freelance translator who believes that MT presents a threat to her livelihood asked rhetorically whether translators should "help to slit our own throats?" Another freelance translator commented that "it takes translators years of hard work to build up a TM and to simply take that away for use in MT would be very wrong and unjust." Indicative of many negative comments is the suggestion that the "work should be protected by copyright". Regarding copyright, 21 participants believe that a translator should own their translated work or any repository of translations, such as a TM.[12]

There have been sporadic attempts for translators and interpreters to work together in order to negotiate collective bargaining agreements (see Author 2017 for further details). In the current survey, 33 participants believe that translators should attempt collective bargaining to set prices and conditions. "This is absolutely essential in the free market", wrote one. Nine participants disagreed, such as the self-employed translator who said "I believe the market should find its own rate." The difficulties and possibilities for organising

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[12] For a discussion on this topic, please see Moorkens and Lewis (2019a).

freelancers are discussed by Wynn (2015), who suggests that they could be represented by trade unions, if these unions are willing to restructure somewhat in order to become more inclusive.

8. Irish language policy and technology

Of the 52 respondents to a question on this topic, 30 were unhappy with domestic Irish language policy; those that were happy (16) or neutral (5) nonetheless felt that there is still room for improvement. Other than among public servants (3 positive, 2 neutral, 3 negative), participant groups were mostly negative. Many felt that the focus on 'official' status was unhelpful, that there are long delays in accessing official correspondence through Irish, and that the requirement to translate "reports that nobody ever reads", as stated by one self-employed translator, is "not doing the language any great service". Teaching of Irish at primary school level is said to be "killing the language", and not helping it to be "seen as inherently desirable for financial and social purposes". One part-time freelancer stated that "on paper, the new system of language plans that came in with the Gaeltacht Act 2012 looks reasonable, but there is no way it can succeed when it's voluntary community committees that are being asked to do all the work with very little resources." Several respondents cited the need for action to encourage greater Irish language use by the general public, but the same freelancer suggested that people "working in this area are doing so without any training in sociolinguistics or language planning." In contrast, all 52 said that the EU was beneficial for the Irish language, with the caveat from two freelancers that it makes little difference day-to-day and that a good deal of material translated for the EU is "of a technical nature which, in my opinion nobody reads." One participant who works for an EU institution wrote that the "improving status of Irish in the EU is a significant element in the 'normalisation' of the language in the modern European setting". He believes that this will lead to a "much better understanding and appreciation in Ireland of the value and worth of Irish" and will "enhance the cultural and social status of Irish in Ireland".

All but two participants were also positive about the forthcoming end to the derogation of the status of Irish, although one freelance translator warned that "there are not enough translators who have reached the standard necessary to translate legislative texts", as reported by the European Commission (2019). One part-time freelancer suggested that it is "ironic that many of the best Irish linguists will be based abroad", an opinion echoed by another part-time freelancer who felt that teleworkers for the EU in Gaeltacht areas could "add to the number of active Irish speakers in the area, [and] boost the local economy", allowing locals to "see that there are jobs available at home and that their language is worthwhile."

All but two participants were very positive about the effects of technology on the Irish language – both for language technology and for social media. A freelance translator wrote that Irish is very much visible in social media, which has a "hugely positive effect on the image of Irish among young people, and the potential for day-to-day use by large numbers of people". Another full-time freelancer commented that "the language might be dying in the Gaeltacht areas, slowly, but it's definitely undergoing a revival outside the Gaeltacht". Participants are very pleased with the availability of new linguistic resources and with the increasing pace of terminology work, which has led to the "coming of age as a digital-age language". There are infrastructural reasons for unequal access to the resources, however, as one full-time freelancer explained that "one of the biggest challenges in living in a Gaeltacht area is the lack of broadband."

With regard to the effect of MT on Irish and Irish language translation, 23 of 49 respondents were negative, with 15 neutral and 11 positive. Positive

comments came from two of 26 freelancers, four of six self-employed translators, three of eight public servants. Negative comments predicted "texts becoming too standardised", and translations that will "further dilute the language". "As a minority language", wrote one public servant, "the pool of highly qualified accredited translators is small". She continued, "a high quality MT will enable this cohort of translators to greatly increase their output and as a result more documents will be provided in Irish, enabling State bodies to fulfil their obligations under the Official Languages Act". Several participants noted that MT needs to be used in the correct manner, preferably by translators themselves: "It's a tool, not the solution".

9. Discussion

This survey was disseminated to all 178 government-accredited Irish language translators for whom an email address was available. Of 99 who began the survey, 52 participants completed all or most sections. The choice of a survey method worked well for those that completed the survey, writing detailed responses to open-ended questions at a time of their choosing. It is possible that focus groups or interviews would have yielded richer data, but data gathering would have taken a longer time for fewer responses. The high attrition rate may mean that the survey was too long – Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie (2015, p. 75) note that this can cause "respondent fatigue" – and in retrospect there were too many topics covered for this type of research. Ruel et al. (2015) highlight the danger of bias caused by non-responses, but in this study the non-responses did not appear to lead to one or another group being underrepresented. A further caveat here is that the employment status options for participants were not defined. This is not a problem for public service translators, directly employed translators, or freelancers, whose role has not required definition in other work about freelance translators. However, the differentiation between freelance and self-employed is not clear, and may relate to participants' perception of their agency within the role or that they subcontract work or directly employ staff.

Participants in this survey were passionate about translation and about the Irish language, but conditions of employment clearly affected their concerns and perspectives regarding their profession. Some freelance translators appear to be thriving, but considering the shortage of accredited Irish language translators, it is perhaps surprising that many are not. There is a danger expressed by two respondents that many of the better translators will move to Europe, and that there will be a hollowing out or brain drain of English-Irish translation talent. This could exacerbate polarisation, reported by Dachs (2018) as a general trend, whereby the demand increases for high-skilled and low-skilled workers. Brexit is unlikely to make a great deal of difference to Irish language recruitment for the Directorate General for Translation in the EC, and could provide a good opportunity for Irish translators other language departments, and particularly for those of the 612,018 who speak a language other than English or Irish at home (Central Statistics Office Ireland, 2017).

The results of this survey indicate that there is a tiered employment market in translation based on employment conditions, quite aside from the variations in market segment as described by Jemielity (2018). In this and other studies, translators have shown pride and satisfaction in their work, but are undermined by poor morale relating to a lack of purpose in their work, isolation, concerns about automation and quality, perceived procedural unfairness in general and in reuse of their work for training MT systems and, for freelance translators, problems with payment. MT post-editing was described as "a thankless task". Considering the need for more entrants to the translation profession in general (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018), and particularly for Irish, these responses should be a cause for concern. Moorkens and Lewis (2019b) have elsewhere

discussed the threat to sustainability of the profession if translation becomes too unappealing to attract new entrants, and the risks inherent when information in translation is difficult to access.

Ruokonen and Mäkisalo (2018, p. 14) suggest that more work on perception of status and job satisfaction may help to resolve the "conflict between translators' own work being appreciated and the profession at large being undervalued". This study and work by Rodríguez-Castro (2015, 2016) could be useful contributions to build on, perhaps using the survey instrument as described in Section 4, with statements about career progression as suggested by Rodríguez-Castro, so as to carry out comparable job satisfaction or subjective career progression studies of cohorts of translators in different jurisdictions, ideally on a longitudinal basis, in order to monitor changes in the profession and to advocate for long-term sustainability.

10. Conclusion

This article reports a survey of accredited Irish-English translators, comprising freelance and self-employed, public service, and directly-employed translators. The survey is unusual, in that it addresses minority-language translators in a particular linguistic and political context. Freelance participants' perceptions of purpose and fairness in work, payment, colleagues, and job security compare poorly to those of their full-time public service colleagues. All translators, however, appear to feel a strong sense of pride in their work. Freelancers report that rates are lower than in previous years and still dropping, and while they would like to work together they appear unable to (as commented on by Berardi (2015)), with some accepting low-paying jobs that are against their own and their colleagues' best interests. This focus on price is common to many types of technical work, that ideally "would be consciously oriented toward politically legitimated human values rather than subject to the whims of profit-making organisations" (Feenberg & Callon, 2010, p. 81).

Public service translators tend to be more well-disposed towards technology and the requirement to continually upskill. They consider that MT will allow us to make better use of the small pool of Irish language translators, with the caveat that this may cause dilution of language variety and quality. Many of the freelance participants feel threatened by technology, the potential for MT to replace human translators, and their powerlessness with regard to human translations being repurposed for MT training.

Responses show a fear of dropping translation quality, [13] a lack of translation talent, and the lack of an audience for translation. As Irish makes progress in one area, it recedes in another, and responses reflect the ongoing decline of Gaeltacht areas (Ó Giollagáin & Mac Donnacha, 2008), which contrasts with the growth of Irish language among the urban middle class (as discussed by Mac Murchaidh, 2008), and the associated rise of Irish language social media and the 'e-gaeltacht'.

Acknowledgements

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[13] Including both product and social quality, according to Abdallah's three-dimensional quality model (2012).

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