Students' Perceptions of Translation: Art, Craft and/or Science?

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Abstract—**The theories and application of translation have been investigated primarily from the perspective of researchers, accredited translators, translation teachers, and trainers. This study examines the lenses through which translation students are motivated to embark on the journey of translation. Whereas translation has long been considered to be an art in which translators principally rely on their talent and passion, or a profession in which practitioners are expected to have acquired necessary skills, translation has gained status as an academic discipline on its own in the past few decades. This paper aims to examine how students from different ethnic backgrounds perceive translation to be while studying the subject at university. To do so, a research questionnaire is devised to obtain students' perceptions of translation as to whether they perceive it to be an art, craft, or science. The questionnaire aims at translation students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, specifically: Arabic, Kurdish, and Persian. The results reveal that the student participants perceive translation to be a combination of the three elements of art, craft and science but to slightly varying degrees.**

Index Terms—Translation, students' perception, art of translation, craft of translation, science of translation

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation makes communication feasible among various nations and it is this very fundamental feasibility of language that facilitates the exchange of knowledge, the absorption of wisdom, and the proliferation of different kinds of perceptions. The process of passing down multiple human intelligences from diverse walks of life can be utilized efficiently through building linguistic bridges. However, the establishment of common grounds among multilingual societies to share their interests, inventions, dreams, and goals confronts some basic challenges due to the fact that certain translators prefer the application of their preferred theories while translating texts.

Schunk and Meece (2009: 21) argue that "research on student perceptions is an active area and we can anticipate that research will continue to examine the variables that influence perceptions and the effects of perceptions in educational settings". Several translation researchers explored students' perception of translation in different contexts, such as: students' perception on translation in EFL classes (Siregar 2018); students' perception on the use of Google Translate (Axelina and Setiawan 2021); students' perception of Google translate in online English learning (Khotimah, Wahyudin and Rohbiah 2021); students' perception of translation activity in poetry class (Larasaty and Prawiro 2021). However, little research has been conducted to specifically explore how students perceive translation. Little space, if any, is given to translation students to share their viewpoints and understanding about the importance of translation in finding jobs, pursuing their studies in the field of translation, and the possibility of creating the culture of peaceful coexistence. This paper aims at exploring the perceptions of university students, who might become future translators, in acquiring more languages via translation studies, the challenges they face while attempting to learn a foreign language, the opportunities that may come their way, if they ever decide to become translators.

Taking into account the perception of university students in translation studies might not look very promising for some, but providing a platform to freely communicate their concerns will help in designing curriculums that would reflect their ideas and interests. After all, one of the major functions of languages is the inauguration of a healthy setting to at least avoid misunderstanding and distortion. Integrating translation students' perceptions into the layers of many theoretical paradigms of translation approaches would eventually make students feel more responsible in carrying out their duties. They would then consider themselves as actual members of the academic environment, which will pave the way for more solidarity, cooperation and reliability.

The idea behind this research comes from the complexity of designating translation as an art, craft or science, or possibly any combination of the three. There is no consensus among translation scholars and researchers as to which of the three strands the notion of translation exactly refers to. In his book, Wergerran Hwnere (Translation is an Art) (1958/2008), the Kurdish linguist and translator, Jamal Nebez, has clearly

attributed artistic traits to the practice of translation. Nebez (2008: 1) argues that translation is lofty art and one needs to have God-given talents to become a competent translator.

Likewise, Chukovskii (1984: 93) refers to translation as an art rather than a science and argues that "translation is not only an art, but a high art". On the other hand, Gabr (2001: 2) considers translation both as a craft and a science, stating "translation being a craft on the one hand, requires training, i.e. practice under supervision, and being a science on the other hand, has to be based on language theories".

This study focuses on the perception of a group of Arab, Kurdish and Persian undergraduate students studying translation and addresses the following research questions in particular:
• What are translation students' perceptions of the translation products currently available?
• How do translation students perceive translation to be (an art, craft and/or science)?
• How might an understanding and analysis of students' different perceptions help in designing a more interactive and successful course book and curriculum?

II. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

A. Data collection
The data of the research has been collected through a questionnaire, which consists of three parts. The first part focuses on the demographics of the participants. The second part consists of a set of nine statements that require answers based on Likert Scale. Each of the three elements of 'art', 'craft' and 'science' are addressed in three statements. The third part of the questionnaire consists of six open-ended questions to get insights into the students' perception of the quality of the current translations, the factors behind low quality of current translations (if they think this), the features account for high quality of translation, the reasons for undertaking translation (if they wish to do so), the characteristics that make an ideal translator, and finally, the role and purpose of translation in society.

B. Demographics of the participants
Overall, 189 students participated in the study through the research questionnaire. In any research project that depends on information from human subjects, it is crucial to first understand the nature and relevance of the participants to the research topic at hand. In this particular research, almost all the data is elicited from student participants. To understand the demographics of the participants, the following four areas have been explored:

1) Students' nationalities
The student participants come from three major Middle Eastern nationalities, viz. Arabic, Kurdish and Persian. The decision to incorporate students from three different nationalities is to allow for broader perspectives and perceptions. Majority of the

participants are Kurdish (57%), nearly a quarter of the participants are Persian (25%) and a considerable minority of participants are Arabs (18%), as shown in figure 1 below.
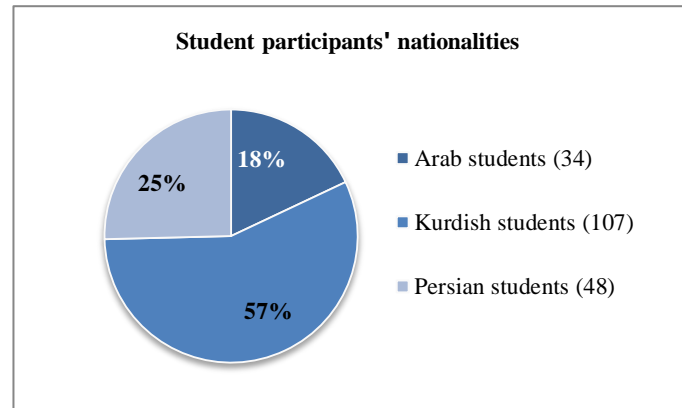

Figure 1: Indication of participants' diverse ethnic backgrounds

2) Students' field of study
All the participants have studied translation either as their major or as part of another relevant field of study. Incorporating students' perceptions from four major fields of study that are correlated in the research; namely, Applied Linguistics (3), English Language and Literature (58), TEFL (9), and Translation (119), as shown in figure 2 below, provides a more inclusive overview of translation which ultimately supports the designing of a course book that could address all those diverse requirements. The assertion and integration of diverse perceptions from students who come from various social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds will allow translation students worldwide as well as students who study translation as part of their field of study to use translation not only for finding job opportunities and a career, but also for intellectual purposes, for acquiring sufficient skills for intensive reading, for expanding their horizons, for boosting self-confidence while communicating, for consolidating one's language skills, and fundamentally for helping to disseminate knowledge objectively.
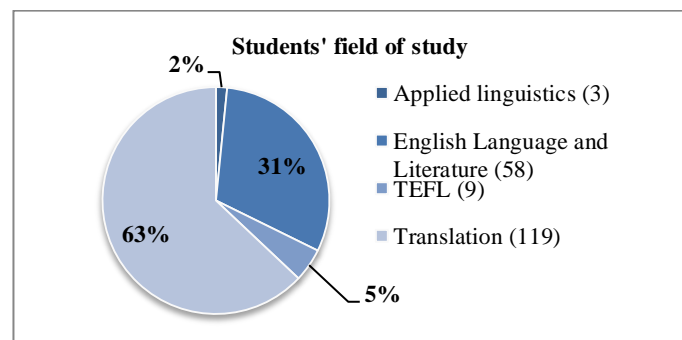

Figure 2: Indication of participants' field of study

3) Students' universities
Students from a wide range of Iraqi and Iranian universities participated in the research. This diversity is very important to ensure that students from different schools and educational

systems share their views and perceptions. After all, different schools and universities are likely to take different approaches in their education systems for teaching their students to pursue a career. Integrating perceptions of students from three nationalities who study in two countries and in eleven public and private universities is not only useful to design a comprehensive course book but it also facilities learning from cultural exchanges. Laws, myths, traditions, inventions of each specific nation have their distinctive linguistic as well as artistic features that jettison them from the other. A successful translation product is achieved when perceptions of translation teachers and experts alongside translation students are integrated.
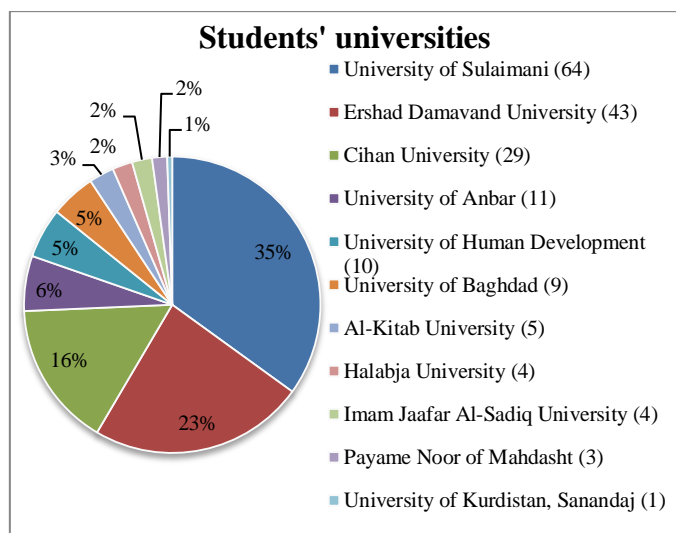

Figure 3: Percentages of students' universities

4) Years of experience studying translation

While all participants have studied translation, as their major or minor field of study, they have different levels of experience studying translation, ranging from 1 year to 4 years. Since a typical translator's level of knowledge and competence in at least two languages are essential to produce high-quality products, the amalgamation of perceptions of students from different age groups will tremendously help in designing a course book that would take into account various linguistic potential, artistic taste, reading, comprehension, translation and writing skills. In order to craft a contemporary, comprehensive course book and to provide efficient trainings that would qualify translation students to confidently translate, translation teachers are required to consider translation methodologies, the type of text, principles of translation, the nature of readership, the mechanics of language, poetic and aesthetic understanding, sense in context and more substantially students' years of pragmatically studying of translation at university.
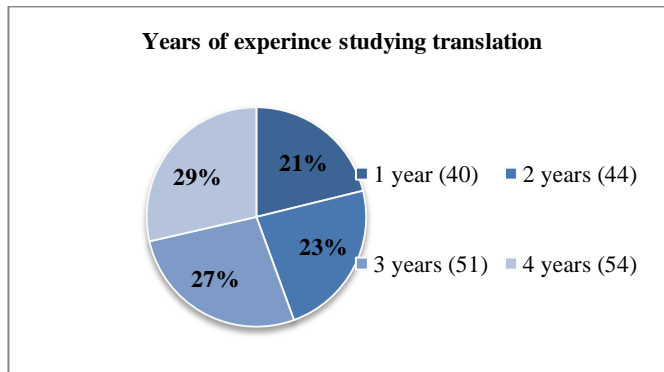

Figure 4: Participants' range of experience studying translation

C. Methodology

The data obtained from the multiple-choice questions have been analyzed using SPSS software and the results are drawn based on Likert Scale. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. The first and third parts of the questionnaire yield qualitative data and require a qualitative method of analysis. The first part focuses on the demographics of the participants and the third part consists of a set of six open-ended questions to get insights into the students' perceptions of various aspects of translation. The second part of the questionnaire, however, consists of nine statements that require answers from a set of five multiple-choice options based on Likert Scale. This part of the questionnaire yields quantitative data that require a quantitative method of analysis.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Students' perception of translation quality and purpose

The third part of the questionnaire consists of six open-ended questions to get insights into the students' perception of various aspects of quality and purpose of translation as well as traits of ideal translators.

The first question explores students' evaluation of the quality of current translations: "How would you evaluate the quality of current translations between English and your language? Nearly a quarter of participants perceive current translations (available between English and their native language) to be of good quality, a few of them even consider current translations to be of excellent quality. A quarter of participants see current translations to be of average quality, while 10% of participants (20 students) describe the quality of current available translations as of low quality. Interestingly, over 10 per cent of participants (22 students) perceive current translation products to contain both high and low quality translated works; they believe that the quality depends on the given translation product and the individual translator.

The participants that have a positive opinion of the quality of current translations refer to various factors. For example, a Kurdish participant states that Kurdish 'translations of decent quality are available, however they are not flawless'. Likewise, a Persian student indicates that 'high quality Persian translations' are available. An Arab student, however, refers to

the fact that some Arabic translations are produced by "distinguished translators".

As for the low quality translations, a Persian student indicates that 'the translated works are normally word-for-word translations, which are not really understandable for the target readers'. Another Persian student specifically refers to movie translation, saying 'nowadays everyone translates movies and sometimes there are mistakes in the translations'. An Iranian Kurdish student shows discontent with the quality of current translations, arguing 'the tendency to read the translated work as the original has turned translation into a pile of fluent text in favor of the target language; sometimes it becomes a whole different work, no longer similar to the original text when we make a contrastive study'.

The second question deals with students' reasons for the production of translated works that they consider to have low quality: 'What are some of the reasons for any low quality of current translations? (If you think the quality of current translations is low, what factors make them so?)'. Only twelve students have given positive feedback describing the translated works in their languages as "good". The rest of the translation students observe current translated works to suffer from five major issues, as follows:

1) a lack of professional training;
2) a lack of cultural knowledge;
3) a lack of proper educational system;
4) a lack of sufficient words and expressions in the TL, and;
5) translators' excessive reliance on machine translation.

They also highlight a few other factors for the proliferation of low quality translated works such as favoritism, corruption, irresponsibility, the absence of law to regulate the field, a lack of financial support, and some translators who translate voluntarily.

Concerning the first reason, which is a lack of professional training, translation students think participating in academic, intensive training courses at universities is vital to obtain high self-confidence. Over 20 students think that translators do not have adequate information about 'rules of translating' and 'theories of translation'. They claim translators depend on "word-for-word translation" and "literal translation" due to a shortage of professional training at universities. They think universities give certificates without providing necessary training to acquire essential skills, and publication houses "trust their awarded university degrees or certificates". In order to become professional translators, they need to have "academic as well as practical qualifications."

With regard to the second reason which is a lack of cultural knowledge, they think 'English, Kurdish, Arabic and Persian' have very "different cultures". They believe "being in touch with the culture of the people that the text is translated from" is crucial to produce an appropriate translation. This can be seen as a valid point since "translation is not only a cross-linguistic activity but also a cross-cultural communication" (Rasul 2019: 166). The participants view 'studying abroad' to interact with native speakers, practicing their language and learning from cultural exchanges as vital requirements for a more effective translation. A lack of cultural experience will create cultural barriers while translating certain culturally specific terminologies that are related to festivals, ceremonies, customs, conventions, myths, scientific discoveries, and literature. Cultural knowledge is obtained when there is an actual cultural exchange and exposure.

Regarding the third reason which is a lack of proper educational system, although this factor is connected to the first one, translation students think that a lack of "necessary books and translation programs", reliable 'dictionaries' specifically designed for translators, and "detailed curriculum" are the major issues that need to be addressed. In order for translation teachers to teach efficiently and effectively, they need to prepare course books and hand them in on time so that students have an idea about the subjects they have to study. They also have to make the designing authentic and functional by updating their knowledge constantly regarding the theory and practice of translation.

Speaking about the fourth reason, which is a lack of sufficient words and expressions in the target language, a participant indicates that "different structures and expressions in both languages create a noticeable gap". Besides, they believe that instead of translating the actual words and sentences, certain translators make use of borrowing words from the "source language" more than necessary. They also highlight some other reasons such as some people 'know little of the second language, but translate'. Having insufficient familiarity with one's own language, its grammar, and sentence structure is also considered as a major reason for low quality translations. 'Idioms and scientific, technological' and medical texts are challenging to translate particularly from English into Kurdish because Kurdish is art-oriented. It is sometimes very difficult to find exact equivalents for medical and scientific discoveries and words.

The final reason, according to the participants, is too much reliance on machine translation. They indicate that translators excessively depend on "modern technology and Google Translate" because such timesaving tools are nowadays easily accessible. Certain translators resort to "translation apps" instead of making use of reliable dictionaries, which is likely to result in the production of a mechanical translation. Machine translations are not equipped with necessary skills to translate artistic texts that are musical. The transference of rhythm and the musicality of a text can be kept only when the translator has the skill to make sense of the characteristic features of the language and its poetic nature.

Participants' perception regarding the second question, approximately 90 per cent of them believe that translators need to work more on their language skills by taking part in professional training and to enhance their cultural understanding of the target language via programs that aim at exchanging cultures. Alongside providing better educational systems in both public and private sectors, translators have to improve their skills in their own language as well as the target language and stop depending on machine translation more than it is required.

The third question addresses students' perceptions about characteristic features of an excellent translation: 'What

qualities account for an excellent translation? (What features make a translation excellent?)'. Almost half of the participants concentrate on the significant value of rendering 'linguistic knowledge, sentence structure, grammar of both languages'. They also consider the study of 'theories, techniques, principles, rules, and types of translation' as something inevitable. Avoiding "word-for-word translation" and adapting "sense-for-sense translation" are accentuated in their answers. For an enjoyable, inspiring, and less challenging translation and a higher quality of work, translators "must have a wide lexicon, not only in the foreign language but also in their mother tongues".

The second most important point for an excellent translation, in their estimation, is cultural knowledge and to be familiar with the author's background. For a productive and useful translation, translators need to know "the source language and it's culture, same for the target language and it's culture; knowing about the author, their personal life, their prospective of certain stuff regarding the translation material, and the time that piece of writing was written". In order for a translated text to make sense, the translator is required to have developed the capacity to accurately translate 'idioms, proverbs, jargons, and street language'. Moreover, their answers emphasize the importance of transferring "meaning" and the application of sense-for-sense translation approach. To effectively obtain cultural knowledge, they propose travelling to participate in 'workshops, seminars, and conferences'.

The third feature, based on their perceptions, is having "talent, passion, and curiosity" alongside "being creative and persistent". They also consider "reading" from various genres as something necessary. The fourth feature is to gain experience from previous mistakes, practice a lot, and give the translated work to an expert to edit it. Interestingly, a participant argues that "there is no such thing as excellent translation. Translated text is an independent work in its own right." Although it depends and follows the original, "it is by no means derogatory, derivative in comparison to it. So, it should not be judged in relation to the original."

To conclude the participants' perception concerning the third question, roughly all participants agree that translation is a process of updating one's knowledge continuously because an excellent translation requires intensive observation and awareness of both the source and the target cultures and languages alongside being passionate and inventive.

The fourth question evaluates students' perceptions about their reasons to work as a translator after they graduate from university: 'If you were interested to do translation work after graduation, what would be the reason(s)? (What are your purposes behind doing translation after graduation?)' Only twenty students have shown no interest to work as a translator after graduation. The rest of the participants are interested in translation, but they have provided different reasons for doing translation. First, a quarter of them want to pursue translation for financial reasons. Second, roughly half of them are keen on improving their language skills, exchanging culture, being familiar with other literature, enriching their knowledge and collecting more information. The third reason for doing

translation is their passion, hobby, and interest.

Regarding the first reason, translation students perceive translation as a potential opportunity to build their lives on financially. They think they will be ready by the time they graduate to work as translators in various sectors. Several participants, interestingly, are fond of becoming "medical, scientific, and legal" translators as these three fields are quite new and offer better chances to get hired. They consider translation as a source of "income to earn money". They also see it as a professional way for "making a living while working at home" which helps to cut transportation expenses.

With regard to the second reason, participants perceive translation as one of the most essential ways to build bridges between "different cultures and nations". Learning from other nation's literature, languages through "subtitling movies", and lifestyles will allow one to "become an open-minded person" which make people "to come out of the small circle" they have been living in and discover more. Translation will enable one to "see other point of views and respect them" even if they disagree with them. They see translation as an effective way to further improve their communication and language skills.

As for the third reason, they want to pursue it as a "hobby and passion". Several participants have said that translation was a "childhood dream". Others want to do translation "to have fun". Producing quality works of translation is a way to create social status and "gain personal reputation to get better offers" and serve communities. Translation, besides, offers a way "to travel" through imagination.

To summarize the fourth question, almost ninety per cent of the participants have shown interest to pursue translation as a source to generate revenue, as a passage to exercise their passion, enhance their knowledge and to finally entertain themselves while navigating other cultures.

The fifth question assesses students' perceptions about traits that make an ideal translator: 'In your opinion, what traits/characteristics make an ideal translator?' Almost half of the participants maintain that an ideal translator should possess certain characteristic features such as being "curious, open-minded, unbiased, competent, flexible, patient, energetic, intelligent, and artistic". They also assert that "punctuality, speed, hard work, persistence" are required to become a successful translator. Alongside "having an insatiable desire for reading books", university "degree and qualification", linguistic, cultural, educational, literary knowledge of both source and target languages, students think experience and time are major necessities for becoming an effective translator.

Translation requires one to be inquisitive and passionate about learning particulars of various cultures. Developing an artistic flavor to accept diversity, a sense of flexibility in absorbing knowledge, and a willingness for creativity are fundamental to "connect two or more languages". Translators should have "comprehensive language skills" and should constantly "learn new references, words, and idioms for better and more rigorous works". They should be able to detect "ambiguity, humors, irony and transfer them to other languages". "Extensive vocabulary range" and the ability to find exact and meaningful equivalents alongside natural talent

in learning languages are vital traits for translators. Putting aside "emotions and ideologies", harnessing excellent writing skills, cultivating critical thinking, and having the potential to absorb and enjoy "multi-cultural" exchanges and environments will guarantee the success of potential translators.

The sixth question explores students' perceptions about the purposes of translation: 'What do you think should be the main purpose(s) of translation in society?' More than half of the participants think the first and the main purpose of translation is to connect, share, socialize, and to communicate "between different cultures, countries, and people". Twenty per cent think the purpose of translation is to personally develop, enrich their language skills and to enjoy learning about others. Other participants think the aim of translation is to "avoid misunderstanding, tell the truth, raise awareness, spread knowledge" and build peace.

"Developing society and serving all classes, sharing ideas and knowledge between different cultures, gathering information about different" social groups are considered as the main purposes of translation. In order to flourish, societies and countries need to present their inventions and exchange them. Alongside being familiar with "different cultures to benefit society in fields like religion, science, human development", removing language barriers between people help peaceful coexistence.

B. Students' perception of the nature of translation

The main purpose of this study is to find out whether students perceive translation to be an art, craft and/or science. Three statements are proposed for each of these three elements and the participants were required to respond to each statement by choosing the most relevant option to the Likert Scale. Through SPSS analysis, results of the answers from the 189 students who answered the questionnaire based on Likert Scale are tabulated below:

Table 1
Results of participants' perceptions of translation based on Likert Scale

Item	Statement	S.D.	D.	N.	A.	S.A.	Mean	Result
Art	Statement 1	15	68	30	56	20	2.99	Neutral
	Statement 2	12	70	39	44	24	2.99	Neutral
	Statement 3	7	45	38	77	22	3.33	Neutral
Craft	Statement 1	3	6	79	101	0	4.47	S. Agree
	Statement 2	5	18	12	101	53	3.95	S. Agree
	Statement 3	19	96	31	36	7	2.56	Disagree
Science	Statement 1	15	86	26	49	13	2.78	Neutral
	Statement 2	9	69	35	60	16	3.03	Neutral
	Statement 3	34	82	18	43	12	2.56	Disagree

1) Translation as an art

Translation has long been viewed as a form of art. In Woolsey's (1974: 166) terms, "translation is an art, or more correctly expressed, ought to be one". Those who work in the field of religious translation and/or literary translation mostly hold this view. To find out students' opinions as to whether they associate translation with art, three statements were suggested:

• Without having a natural talent, it is difficult to be a good translator even if you study and practice translation.
• Translators are like artists; they do not need a degree or training to produce high-quality translations.
• If you are not gifted to translate, you will not become a qualified translator even if you have a degree in translation.

As can be seen from the table above, the mean of answers to the first two statements are exactly the same (2.99), while the mean of answers to the third statement is slightly higher (3.33). However, results from all the three statements locate in the Neutral position of the scale. What can be construed from the results is that the participants associate 'a natural talent', 'artistic skills' and 'giftedness' to translation (i.e. they perceive translation to be an art), but only to a certain degree.

2) Translation as a craft

In today's realm of academia, one cannot ignore the relevance of the job market. To find out students' opinion as to whether they associate translation with craft or profession, three relevant statements were suggested, as follows:

• Undertaking training and improving translation skills are necessary steps to feel confident enough to work as a translator.
• You can consider yourself a good translator only after practicing translation and gaining experience.
• Having translation experience alone does not make you a good translator.

The mean of answers to the first two statements is considerably high (4.47 and 3.95, respectively), locating in the Strongly Agree position of the scale. The mean of answers to the third statement, however, is quite low (2.56), occupying the Neutral position of the scale. This result indicates the validity of the answers, because the third statement is expressed in a negative form. The mean of answers to the three statements together is 3.66, which corresponds to the Neutral position of the scale. While the degree of perceiving translation as a craft is higher than that of translation as an art, the results again suggest that the student participants associate translation to practical skills and experiences (i.e. they perceive translation as a craft) but only to a certain extent.

3) Translation as a science

Associating translation to science and academic does not have a long history; it perhaps starts with James Holmes's efforts to develop translation into an independent academic field. Holmes's 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies', a research paper originally presented in the Third International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen in 1972, is seen as one of the first efforts to develop translation into a separate academic discipline (Rasul 2015: 30).

To ascertain whether students associate translation with science, three statements were suggested, as follows:

• You can be a competent translator without studying translation at university.

• Without academic qualification, you will not be able to get a job and become a successful translator.

• Anyone who studies translation or takes translation courses can eventually become a good translator.

The mean for answers to the first two statements (2.78 and 3.03, respectively) take the Neutral position of the scale, whereas the mean for answers to the third statement (2.56) occupies the Disagree position of the scale. The results suggest that while the participants understand the importance of having an academic qualification, they do not agree that a degree qualification alone can make one a good translator. The mean of answers to the three statements together is 2.79, which marks the Neutral position of the scale. The results again suggest that the student participants associate translation to science but to a certain extent, which is lower than the degree of perceiving it as an art or craft.

What can be concluded from the analysis above is that the student participants perceive translation to be a combination of art, craft and science but to slightly varying degrees. With the total mean of 3.66, perceiving translation as a craft takes the first position. This is following by translation as an art, with the total mean of 3.10. In the third position, translation is viewed as a science, with a total mean of 2.79. The fact that the student participants associate translation to art, craft and science all at the same time can be seen as a logical conclusion - all the three areas are more or less relevant in the study and practice of translation. This largely corresponds to the perception of the prominent British translation scholar, Peter Newmark (1988: 189), who contends that "all translation is partly science, partly craft, partly art, partly a matter of taste". Describing translation in terms of any one of the three areas of art, science or craft alone does not actually provide a complete picture of translation. As Shastri (2012: 8) suggests, whether translation to be viewed as an art, craft or science "depends on the type of the text, the purpose of the translation and the intention of the original writer".

CONCLUSIONS

Insights into students' understanding and perception of the subjects they study are crucial to achieve worthwhile learning outcomes. Through a research questionnaire, this study sought to find out whether students studying translation at university perceive translation to be an art, craft or science.

The results show that student participants do not perceive translation to be any of the three elements of art, craft or science alone, but rather a mixture of the three. This can be seen as a logical conclusion since all the three aspects are more or less relevant in the study and practice of translation. Describing translation in terms of any one of the three elements alone does not provide a complete picture of translation.

The implication of the study is that, to make translation courses more effective and fruitful, academic institutions and translation teachers need to design translation programmes in a way that combine the three aspects of art, craft and science. In so doing, students need to be introduced to the artistic nature of translation in addition to theoretical and practical studies of translation. Moreover, students also need to be introduced and exposed to translation as a craft that is reflected in the actual day-to-day practice of professional translators in the job market.

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The questionnaire can be accessed in the link below:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeW78_uiD0Y8cMTzzXyxiJGe-47BeTWtf2AFHPAeiV4BcmoOg/viewform