Accomplishment in the multitude of counsellors: Peer feedback in translation training

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Abstract: The study probes into translation students' perception of the value of online peer feedback in improving translation skills. Students enrolled in a translation degree in Australia translated a 250-word text on two separate occasions. On each occasion, the students were given another fellow student's translation of the same text to mark and provide anonymous peer feedback. The original translations from all the students, together with any peer feedback, were uploaded onto an online forum. The students were encouraged to download their own translation to review the peer feedback in it. They were also encouraged to download and peruse other students' peer reviewed translations for comparison. Upon completion of the project, the students were surveyed about their perceptions and appreciation of their engagement in the process in the following three capacities: (i) as a feedback provider, (ii) as a feedback recipient, and (iii) as a peruser of other students' work and the peer feedback therein. Results suggest that translation students appreciate online peer feedback as a valuable activity that facilitates improvement. The students found receiving peer feedback on their own translation especially rewarding, as it offered alternative approaches and perspectives on tackling linguistic/translation issues. In comparing the three capacities, students perceived reviewing feedback on their own work and perusing other students' work as more beneficial than engaging in giving feedback to others

Keywords: translator training; peer feedback; online feedback; cross marking

> *In the multitude of counsellors there is accomplishment.*
> *Proverbs 15:22*

1. Introduction

Peer feedback is an established language pedagogy activity and is commonly employed in writing classes. Peer feedback is used for both first language (L1) and second language (L2) writing classes (Coit, 2004). There is now an impressive body of research on peer feedback in L2 writing classes, ranging from perception studies such as students' perceptions on peer feedback as an L2 learning technique, the contrast between students' perceptions of teacher feedback and peer feedback, to studies of effectiveness such as the students' take-up rate of peer feedback in subsequent revisions, to motivational studies such as student empowerment and confidence boosting as a result of being entrusted with a teacher-like status (for a comprehensive review on peer feedback in L2 writing classes, see Rollinson, 2005).

Previous research has confirmed the positive effects of peer feedback in student learning. It has been found that feedback receivers do value and incorporate peer feedback and corrections into their subsequent revisions (Mei & Yuan, 2010). Although peer feedback is less likely to be adopted by learners than teacher feedback, learners do welcome peer feedback, and evidence suggest that peer feedback leads to improvements in learners' writing (Miao, Badger, & Zhen, 2006). One large scale study also found a strong correlation between assessment marks given by peers and marks given by experts (Tseng & Tsai, 2007). From a learner-centred perspective, the practice of peer feedback empowers the students who provide the feedback (Coit, 2004), reduces learner anxiety and increases learner confidence (Lin & Chien, 2009; Mei & Yuan, 2010). Furthermore, while much attention is given to the reception of feedback, a recent study found that learners derive more benefits from providing feedback on others' work than from receiving feedback from others, i.e. there is more in giving than receiving (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009).

However, despite the overwhelming amount of research pointing to the benefits of the practice of peer feedback in language education, there has been very little research done on adopting peer feedback in tertiary level interpreting and translation training. Of the small number of studies done on learner autonomy in interpreting and translation training, a good majority focus on oral interpreting training (Bartłomiejczyk, 2007; Ficchi, 1999; Hartley, Mason, Peng, & Perez, 2004; Wang, 2009); only one study, to our knowledge, discusses learner autonomy and peer feedback in written translation training (Lindgren, Sullivan, Deutschmann, & Steinvall, 2009). Lindgren et al.'s (2009) study looked at peer discussion in computer-based translation exercises and concluded that encouraged student reflection of the translation task.

The adoption of peer feedback in translation training is well motivated for a number of reasons. Firstly, given that bilinguals undergoing training to work between their L1 and a weaker L2 are by definition being trained as L2 learners (Campbell, 1998), translation training to some extent involves *de facto* L2 writing training and should thus be amenable to peer feedback in a similar fashion as regular L2 writing classes. Secondly, different modes of written translation and oral interpreting can be viewed as points existing on a translation-speech continuum (Campbell, 1998; Campbell & Wakim, 2006). When seen from the perspective of a translation-interpreting continuum, favourable findings from previous studies on learner autonomy in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting training (Bartłomiejczyk, 2007; Ficchi, 1999; Hartley et al., 2004) hold great promises for the application of the similar pedagogical methodologies to written translation training.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has emerged as an important sub-discipline of language teaching in recent years. As CALL gains momentum, an emerging focus in the area of peer feedback is the role of media and technology in providing and receiving peer feedback (Moloudi, 2011). Two recent studies have reported positive responses from learners on receiving online and weblog based feedback (Bauer, Figl, Derntl, Beran, & Kabicher, 2009; Liou & Peng, 2009).

Against this background, this study aims to fill in the gap of a lack of study in peer feedback in translation training. The present study is innovative in five ways. Firstly, it applies peer feedback to a new learning context, i.e. translation training. Secondly, L2 writing class students typically write on the same topic but the actual writing that each student produces differs from person to person. Therefore, whereas L2 writing class students provide feedback on their peer's work that does not mirror their own, in this study,

trainees are all given the same source text to translate, meaning that feedback givers evaluate and comment on their partner's version of the same text, the version under evaluation would have a strong degree of resemblance to their own work. Thirdly, this project capitalises on the online environment, making use of online forums that are freely available and accessible to all learners (see Section 3). Fourthly, face-to-face and non-anonymous peer feedback can lead to complimentary feedback given out of learners' reluctance to criticise their peers (Carson & Nelson, 1996). The present study with its online feedback design ensures feedback providers and receivers' anonymity, thus eliminating face and politeness considerations while still maintaining cooperative learning. Finally, unlike traditional peer feedback, where only the student author has access to the feedback, the online forum design of this project gives every learner access to every other learner's work and the peer feedback contained therein, hence maximising the number of beneficiaries of the feedback.

2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The innovative application of internet-mediated peer feedback, a well-established L2 writing pedagogy activity, to translation training drives the present study. Specifically, the present study addresses the following question:

RQ: What are translation students' perceptions of their engagement in online peer feedback on their translation exercises?

In order to answer the research question, three research hypotheses are derived:

H1: Translation students find providing feedback on a peer's work a valuable learning activity.

H2: Translation students find reviewing a peer's feedback on their own work a valuable learning activity.

H3: Translation students find reviewing other students' work together with peer feedback on it a valuable learning activity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants
Seventeen Chinese speaking students enrolled in the Level 3 Accreditation Studies unit of the Interpreting and Translation programs at the University of Western Sydney participated in this study. All of the participants were international students from China. Since their English L2 is considerably weaker than Chinese L1, the decision was made to only engage them in providing feedback on translation in the English into Chinese direction but not vice versa.

3.2 Tasks
Participants were given two texts of 250 words each to translate. The texts complied with the setting guidelines and standards as stipulated by the National Accreditation Authority for Translator and Interpreters (NAATI) for the Professional Translator accreditation examination. Text 1 was given in week four and Text 2 in week seven of a thirteen-week semester. Participants were randomly assigned a marker to whom they would send their completed

translation for marking and feedback. To ensure anonymity, a participant was advised to send their translation to their designated marker identified only by a UWS student email address (e.g. 250000000@student.uws.edu.au). The participant would send the translation to his/her designated marker. The designated marker would send his/her work to a third student, thus avoiding potential reciprocal complimenting or retaliatory criticisms arising from cross-marking. The designated marker had one week to mark the translation and provide feedback. Marking and feedback is providing using the 'Track Change' function of Microsoft Word. By the end of the week, the marker would email the marked work to an online forum (Google Group) as an email attachment. The email has the student number of the translation author in the subject line. Once sent, the email became a discussion thread on the forum (see Appendix B). The author of the translation could visit the forum to download his/her marked work with feedback from the designated marker. As the forum served as a central repository for every learner's translation and its feedback, learners could download and read everyone else's translation and the peer feedback in it.

Participants were instructed to provide feedback the way a class teacher would for their translation assignments, yet they were not to give scores or deductions as the actual grading of the translation was outside of the scope of this exercise. They were instructed that feedback could include corrections and remarks on the syntax, collocations, lexical choices, mistranslations, spelling and punctuations, and the overall idiomaticity of the translation.

3.3 Data
Once the marking of both texts were completed and uploaded, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire (see Appendix A) containing a mix of open- and close-ended questions. The questionnaire is divided into three parts. Part 1 asks for the students' opinion on their role as the feedback giver, Part 2 asks for their opinion as a feedback receiver, and Part 3 asks for their opinion about their access to other students' work from the online forum. The questionnaire data were then analysed qualitatively and quantitatively to ascertain the participants' perceptions of their engagement in the activity.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Analyses
In addressing the three hypotheses of this study, the participants' responses in the questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive in all three parts.

As can be seen in Figure 1, participants either agreed or strongly agreed that all three practices, i.e. providing feedback to peers (Marker), receiving feedback from peers (Receiver) and reviewing other students' work online (Peruser) were beneficial to their learning. It may therefore be concluded that the three hypotheses proposed in Section 2 were confirmed.

In terms of the amount of time spent on providing feedback, Figure 2 shows that participants spent between fifteen and forty-five minutes per text on marking and providing feedback on another student's translation. Taken together, data in Figures 1 and 2 suggest that the participants felt the benefits derived from this activity outweigh the efforts expended. Spending up to forty-five minutes per text is generally not considered a great workload burden in addition to the students' existing workload.
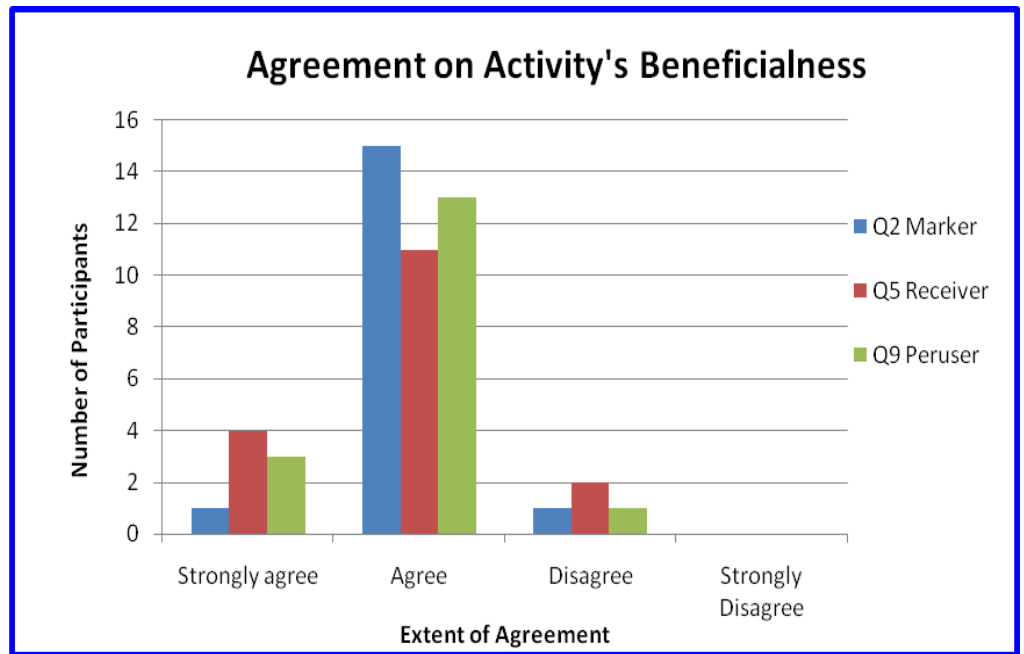
Figure 1. The extent to which participants agreed with the beneficialness of the peer feedback on translation activity.
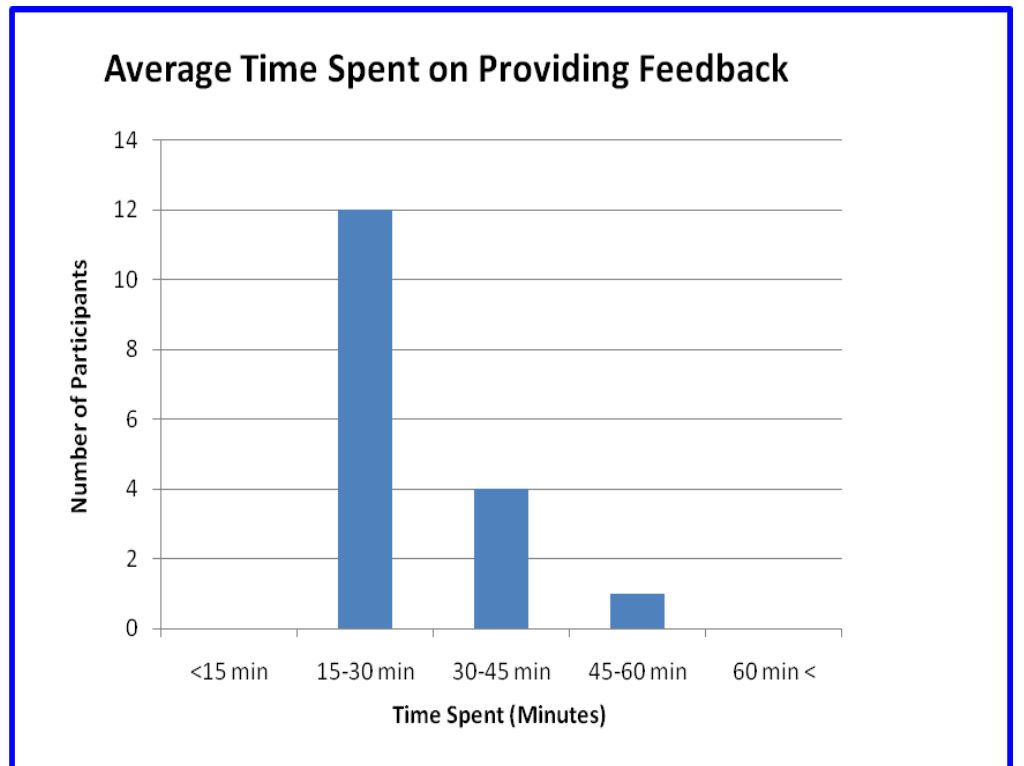

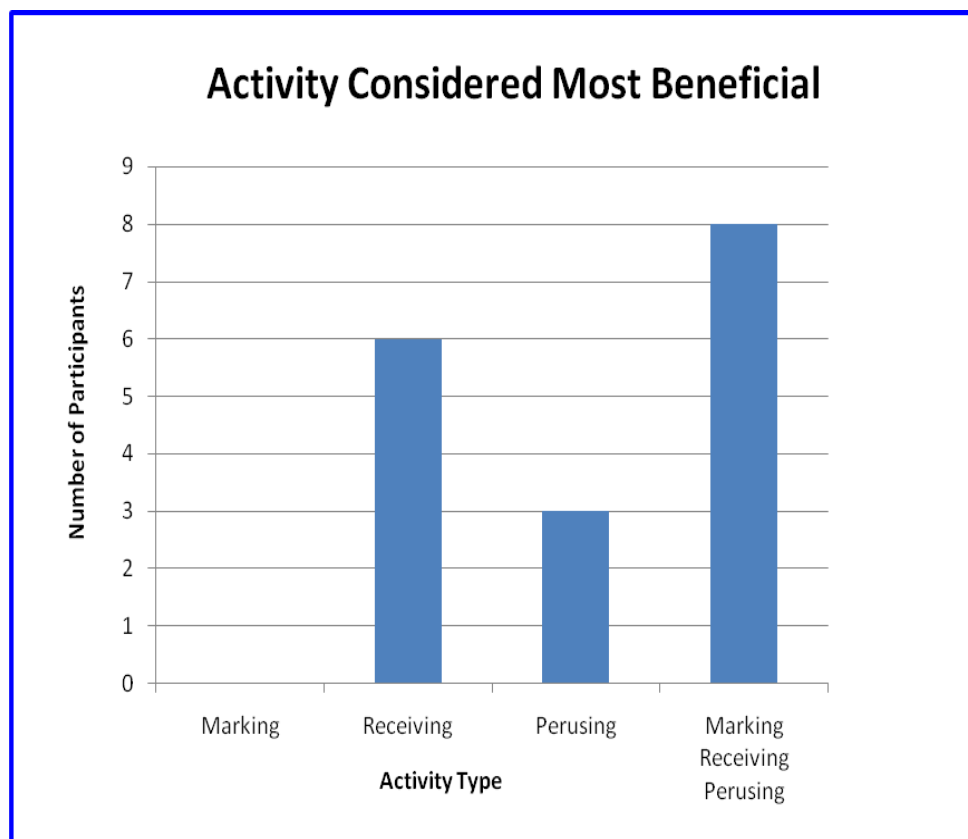*Figure 2. Average time spent on providing feedback.*

Figure 3. Activity considered most beneficial.

Figure 3 shows that in comparing the benefits derived from the three exercises (Q11), i.e. marking, receiving feedback and perusing feedback, six participants stated that they benefited the most from receiving peer feedback on their own, and three participants identified perusing other students' work online as most beneficial. Whilst no participants singled out marking as the most beneficial activity, marking was valued insofar as the fact that eight participants stated that the three exercises were equally beneficial.

In Q4, when given the options of spending the same amount of time to either (i) provide feedback on another student's translation, or (ii) translate another text, three participants chose to do additional translation on their own and to not engage in peer feedback; four participants chose to mark another student's translation. However, in Q7, when choosing between (ii) peruse other students' work and feedback online, and (i) translating another text, participants unanimously chose (i) to peruse other students' work online.

The responses to Q11, Q4 and Q7 indicate that participants do not readily share the view that there is greater gain in providing feedback than in receiving it (cf. Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). Rather, participants are keener to observe others in action, peruse other students' work as well as the feedback on their own work.

4.2 Qualitative Analyses
In the questionnaire where participants explained their reasons for valuing the opportunity to provide feedback on another student's work (Q3), their answers typically centred on the fact that they were able to see another

student's different approach to the text. Some of the participants' comments on the benefit of being a marker are: (quoted verbatim)

(a)   It's good to see the translation from others and mark it as a teacher.
(b)   I can see my partner's different approach to the task when I mark his/her work.
(c)   It helps me to see other visions translated by others, get some ideas of … the way they interpret the original meaning. Because I'm responsible for the correction I give, I have to be even more careful than doing my own translation.
(d)   I get different view from the others' understanding and I lean how they translate the same sentence.
(e)   By comparing other student's work with mine, I can … correct my own translation.
(f)   I learned how other students made mistakes… by recognising others' mistakes, I probably can avoid those mistakes in the future.
(g)   It is quiet surprise that we can understand one sentence in such different ways.
(h)   When marking other's work, I can see more some mistakes that can be easily made, though I did not make them this time, I still have to be careful when translating them.

It is of interest to note that some participants (as in comments (a) & (c) above) noted the empowerment and the added responsibility endowed to them as markers, and (c) in particular identified a specific benefit that was derived from his temporarily elevated role of a quasi-teacher (Coit, 2004).

One participant noted the benefits derived from the engaging in the deliberation process when evaluating another person's translation: (Quote)

(i)   This forces me to rethink the choice(s)… regarding … other's different translation, which actually points out some problems that I haven't realised before.

Students greatly appreciated receiving peer feedback on their own work (Q6). One very obvious benefit is the corrections for careless errors/mistranslations. More importantly, however, is the common belief that the feedback offered alternative ways of conceptualising a particular issue, at not just the lexical level but also at the higher sentence and discourse levels. Some comments that reflected this appreciation are: (Quotes)

(j)   Because some correction/suggestion of my original translation gave me a lot of inspiration to restart thinking about the sentences, and try to make it better.
(k)   Since I couldn't see my weakness clearly by myself, but the person who edit my translation will have their own opinion which is very precious for me.
(l)   Sometimes, I find myself always stick to one kind of translation. This cannot be a good way to improve my translation. However, having reviewed the feedback, I did realise that there are other ways to translate the text and those ways are even better.
(m)   It helps my translation skills in the ST comprehension and words choices of translation.

In (Q10), students also reported finding the opportunity to peruse other students' work online very helpful. A common thread in the responses for their perusal role was the synergy of the multitude, or the accumulation of ideas, such as can be seen in (n) and (r): (Quotes)

(n)   As I review more of others translation, the benefit became more significant
(o)   More versions means more possibilities… better ones always appear.
(p)   Reviewing others' translation help me to see how the work is generally.
(q)   It enables me to identify similar errors made by others and reminds me not to make them in the future.

(r) I may review many ways of translating and editing. It's good way to learn, with my own idea as comparison.

(s) I can learn different expressions for the same sentence and remember the good one, I think that is very helpful.

4.2.1 Dissenting Views

While the general consensus was that peer feedback was beneficial, there were also some dissenting voices, pointing out that the origin of the feedback being other students meant the feedback was not sufficiently illuminating. For example, Response (t) showed that the participant found the feedback on her work confusing at times because a potentially correct translation could be marked as incorrect.

(t) The feedback... is not as reliable as the teachers', and sometimes it may confuse me.

(u) They are not all accurate and there are too many mistakes.

One participant took a cautious approach to interpreting other students' translation and feedback, whilst not rejecting them outright, she did nevertheless note the peer feedback's lack of authority and assurance for quality:

(v) Also, we tend to make same or similar mistakes and it's hard to tell. When it comes to complicated mistakes or idiomatic expression, none of us is qualified.

5. Conclusion

This present preliminary study obtained very encouraging results, suggesting that translation students do appreciate peer feedback as a valuable activity that aids their learning. Students found receiving peer feedback on their translation especially rewarding, as it offered an alternative approach to tackling the same issue. Students often perceived the alternative approach suggested by their peers as more superior than their original approach. On the roles of feedback receiver and peruser, students repeatedly voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to see other students' translations in addition and alternative to one's own. By designating students to give peer feedback, the students were temporarily elevated to the position of marker. This elevated status contributed to building confidence in the students (Coit, 2004). The added responsibilities of being a marker also incentivised the feedback provider to deliberate on the translation at hand and offer feedback conscientiously and responsibly. Perusing other students' work online offered an extension for those wishing to take full advantage of the results brainstorming from the entire group.

As noted in the literature (e.g. Miao et al., 2006) and also commented on by two of the participants, peer feedback needs to be taken in context. Whilst students recognise the dynamism that synergy brings about, i.e. the fostering of critical thinking and alternative perspective taking, they must examine peer feedback with caution, since peer feedback by definition differs from professional or teacher feedback in terms of its quality, authority and definitiveness. This point notwithstanding, participants nonetheless overwhelmingly reported their appreciation for additional feedback and the privilege of viewing other students' work.

Freelance translators often work in isolation, churning through translation assignments on their own; and this can be reflected to a certain extent in translation training. The results of this study have potential

implications for interpreting and translation training. The results show that when students take on the role of the marker or peruser, they are given access to a whole new perspective on the same task. The pedagogical value in giving students access to examples of alternative ways of conceptualising an issue is that it fosters critical thinking, which is particularly vital in disciplines such as translation where clear rights and wrongs often do not exist. When a teacher offers students an exemplar translation, the quality of such translation is assured. Nevertheless, students may feel that the standard of the teacher's exemplar translation is unattainable for them as novice translators. However, when students see that their peer is able to produce or suggest brilliant alternative renditions, this could encourage them to strive further, believing that if a peer novice translator of comparable skills and experience could do better, so could they.

Although the sample size of this study was small, the preliminary results offer some initial insight into translation students' perceptions of the pedagogical value of providing and reviewing peer feedback. Further empirical studies need to be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of peer feedback in improving the performance competency of translation students.

The participants in the present study did not fully appreciate the benefits to themselves in putting efforts into providing feedback to someone else (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). For future implementations of peer feedback exercises, the benefits of providing feedback to others could be highlighted to the students prior to the commencement of the exercises. This could be done in the form of a briefing session with students on the positive impact that they themselves will experience as a result of commenting on and editing other students' work. This will also serve to encourage students to engage more fully and meaningfully in commenting, assessing and providing feedback to other students.

The present study has limited the scope to the views of Chinese translation students. The views of translation students of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds were not explored. The different cultural norms may influence the way students of other cultural backgrounds view face-to-face peer feedback as opposed to online peer feedback. Moreover, the present study focuses on student perceptions; it does not allude to the actual effectiveness of online peer feedback on the students' academic outcomes. These are areas in which further studies are warranted.

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Appendix A

The following is the questionnaire administered to the participants.
Peer Feedback on Translation Exercises

Student Evaluation Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this short survey. The purpose of this survey is to collect some student evaluation on the effectiveness of the 'Peer-Feedback on Translation Exercises' project.

In regards to you <u>providing</u> feedback to your partner:
1.   How much time did you spend on marking your partner' translation
a.   Less than 15 minutes per passage.
b.   Between 15 and 30 minutes per passage
c.   Between 30 and 45 minutes per passage
d.   Between 45 and 60 minutes per passage
e.   More than 60 minutes per passage

2. You have benefited greatly from marking another student's translation. (Tick one)
Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. Why did you give that particular answer in Question 2?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. If you were to choose between **spending the same amount of time on** (i) marking another student's translation, and (ii) translating another text by yourself, which one would you choose? (Tick one)
(i)   Marking another student's translation.
(ii)   Translating another text by yourself.
(iii)   Others:
_____

In regards to you <u>receiving</u> peer-feedback on your translation:
5. You benefited greatly from reviewing the peer-feedback you received for your translation. (Tick one)
Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. Why did you give that particular answer in Question 5 ?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. If you were to choose between **spending the same amount of time on** (i) reviewing another student's feedback on your translation, and (ii) translating another text by yourself, which one would you choose? (Tick one)
(iv)   Reviewing another student's feedback on your translation.
(v)   Translating another text by yourself.

(vi) Others:

_____

In regards to you <u>reviewing</u> other students' work online:
8. How many other students' translation **of the same passage** did you review online?
f.   1~3
g.   4~6
h.   6~9

9. You have benefited greatly from reviewing other students' translations online. (Tick one)
Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. Why did you give that particular answer in Question 9?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

11. Which part of the project benefited you the most?
(vii)   Providing feedback to other students.
(viii)   Receiving feedback on your own translation.
(ix)   Reviewing other students' versions and peer-feedback online.
OR
(x)   All three parts (giving, receiving, reviewing) were <u>equally</u> beneficial.
(xi)   You benefited very little from this project.

Appendix B

The following is a screenshot of the Google Group: