Because We're Worth It: Disentangling Freelance Translation, Status, and Rate-Setting in the United Kingdom

Dr Joseph Lambert, Cardiff University

Dr Callum Walker, University of Leeds

Abstract: Rate-setting is a problematic area for newcomers to translation and established practitioners alike. Survey data generally support the view that translators feel underpaid and that money matters remain a chief ethical and pragmatic concern, but appropriate guidance is almost entirely absent from introductory textbooks on the translation profession and documentation prepared by industry associations remains unsatisfactory. Focusing on the translation industry in the United Kingdom, this conceptual paper explores constraints that limit price formation practices, and argues that translators feel under threat from disruptive technologies, Uberisation, and non-professional translation, now more than ever. We explore the complex interaction between status, internal and external perceptions, and regulation, and illustrate their push-pull relationship with rate-setting within a range of industry 'educators', uncovering the ways in which translators themselves, translation associations, and academic institutions directly and indirectly impact upon rate-setting practices. The article concludes by considering potential channels to buoy status and improve rate-setting practices in the translation industry.

Keywords: status, translation rates, income, professionalisation, translation profession, Uberisation, translation industry, freelance translation

1. Introduction

Rates of pay are critically important to freelance translation professionals. Often working part-time in an inherently precarious form of employment (Pym et al. 2012), earning a fair income reflective of the endeavours inherent in professional translation ranks highly among translators' priorities. Given the numerous threats posed to the industry, including a lack of regulation, automation, and the risky nature of outsourcing more generally, a critical review of rate-setting practices is essential to fully disentangle the complex factors that contribute to professional rate-setting practices.

In translator training, modules incorporating simulated projects are growing in popularity, but not as abundant as might be expected, meaning that opportunities to engage with rate-setting are often lacking for newcomers to the industry. In terms of literature, Robinson's textbook *Becoming a Translator* reflects on the relationship between income and speed, collaboration, specialisation, and project management, and "raising the status of the profession" (2020, 43). Gouadec (2007) dedicated an entire chapter to time and money, focusing first on the practicalities of quotations before offering a sub-section on "Earning More", in which he advocates specialisation, improving productivity, selecting "good" clients, and regularly raising rates. The general principles are sound – especially "stand[ing] up to clients who always demand 'a bit more for a bit less'" (Gouadec 2007, 224) – but the guidance only indirectly addresses the heart of the problem. Jenner and Jenner's *Entrepreneurial Linguist* (2010) provides some economic grounding in price competition and briefly addresses signalling and lack of regulation, but still indirectly condones bowing to price pressure through discounts.

Other textbooks focus more on translation theory than practice and offer no guidance on rates in the translation industry, which is understandable in a discipline that has historically struggled with the "Great Divide" (Jemielity 2018, 543) between theory and practice. The number of non-academic books on 'being a successful translator' is also vast, not to mention the countless resources and blogs available online, which, in our opinion, offer little constructive rate-setting guidance to the individual translator. This summary is not intended to criticise these resources, which provide useful pragmatic insights on various levels; but they do not offer clear guidance on appropriate pay or how such a relative and complex concept as *appropriate* rates might be construed.

In a recent survey of 1,510 freelance translators (Inbox Translation 2020), 59% of respondents identified "low rates of pay" (including downward pressure on rates) as the leading challenge of being a freelance translator. Rates also ranked top in the Institute of Translation and Interpreting's *Spring 2020 Pulse Survey* (ITI 2020). For the 79% of those surveyed by Inbox Translation who worked with Language Service Providers (LSPs), "low rates of pay" was the leading challenge, in contrast with the 81% of respondents who worked with direct clients and reported "higher rates of pay" as a key benefit (74%). The numerical data also supported these claims, with the median rates per word charged to an LSP for general and specialised texts at £0.063 and £0.076 respectively; for direct clients, these rates increased to £0.09 and £0.099. The data further showed that LSPs were 2.5 times as likely to ask translators to lower their rates than direct clients. A 2012 study foreshadowed these concerns over prices and a sense of powerlessness in the face of pressure from LSPs (Kelly, DePalma, and Hegde 2012, 20).

Focusing on the United Kingdom (UK) specifically, this article argues that appropriate rate-setting practices cannot be achieved by translators alone. Rather, a change in attitudes to rates is embedded within an understanding of worth by all parties, while also recognising the value and status of translators in their day-to-day work. The article begins with a discussion of translators' status in light of internal and external perceptions and in the face of disruptors and their limited agency in professional relationships. We then build on this initial review by exploring a number of educators that play a key role in shaping professional translators' status and remuneration.

2. Underpaid and undervalued?

The low status of the translation profession is a pervasive observation in Translation Studies (TS) (Monzó-Nebot 2019), but the fact that this perception has not been shaken off – internally or externally – demonstrates that these concerns remain and may even be growing. Survey data generally support the view that translators feel underpaid and undervalued, and that money remains a leading ethical and pragmatic concern, especially considering the close relationship between low rates of pay and low barriers to entry to the profession (Inbox Translation 2020; ITI 2020).

TS research into the status of translators has been ongoing in earnest for approximately two decades, but started to flourish in the late-2000s. Dam and Zethsen observed that translation was frequently referred to as a "low-status profession in both professional and scholarly journals" (2008b, 2), but that the topic had been subject to negligible investigation (2008a, 73). Around the same time, three special issues were published with a focus on translators' status (Dam and Zethsen 2009; Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2009, 2010). The area was further galvanised by Chesterman's (2009) call for a programme of cultural, cognitive, and sociological research into what translators do, their rates, and the wider institutional systems, processes, and networks of which translators are part, and 'codified' by a dedicated chapter on the *Status of Translators* (Katan 2011) in the *Handbook of Translation Studies*.

One of the most far-reaching studies in this area was Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, and Chan's (2012) report on the status of the translation profession in the European Union. The report investigated the value of translators' skills, identifying economic signalling as a key determinant of status. However, they reported differing levels of regulation across the EU, calling for improved signalling of status, including for "paraprofessionals", better recognition of qualifications, and trans-national certification systems (ibid., 128-129). Since then, publication trajectories pursued a number of different paths, focusing on professionalisation in specific regions (for example, Liu 2021), translation as a profession and/or occupation (Tyulenev 2015), signalling and certification (Chan 2013), and new developments in translation industry practices (Moorkens 2017, 2020a; Pym and Torres-Simón 2021).

Despite frequent mention of rates of pay in translator surveys, remuneration has been subject to relatively little attention in TS. In the main, the (micro-)economic factors underpinning price formation are little-explored in TS and are often misunderstood by student translators and fully-fledged practitioners. Chan's (2005) article is a rare exception that addresses the issue explicitly, but is now rather dated. His later article (2017) addresses broad supply and demand factors, and comments poignantly on the relationship between information asymmetry and lower prices (2017, 93), but with less detail on how supply and demand influence price formation. Walker's textbook on *Translation Project Management* (2022 forthcoming) addresses this lacuna, outlining factors influencing LSP and vendor price formation, but is still limited by the lack of pricing data from the industry. Doherty (2016) touches on growth rates in the industry more generally, and Nunes Vieira charts pay across time (2020, 4-6) in the US and UK, positing that some of the decreasing rates are being experienced in the "less professionalized sectors of the market". He concludes that de-professionalizing effects may be a more concerning issue than technology in the short term, though the implication that professional association affiliation guards translators from issues of pay is arguably misguided. Finally, Do Carmo (2020) links the increased productivity brought about by post-editing to persistent downward trends in rates against the wider backdrop of industry prices not tracking inflation in the UK. Importantly, he connects rates, skills recognition, and talent retention to the long-term sustainability of the profession.

A common underlying theme, even if not explicitly stated as such, is perceptions of status. In the sub-sections that follow, we briefly discuss what we consider to be two main drivers of downward pressure on status: perceptions of status, and new (and established) disruptors in the translation industry.

2.1. Perceptions

For Monzó-Nebot (2019, 192), issues of status and the related concerns over professionalisation are generally tied to "demands for higher social awareness, visibility, prestige, salaries, or professional ranks". She conceptualises status as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, separating prestige (status conferred on capable individuals by other members of society), objective status (an objective position within a social structure), and *perceived,* self-assessed status (which does not necessarily match empirical professional realities). We maintain the use of objective status, while opting for the more transparent labels of internal and external perceptions to account for notions of self-assessed status and prestige respectively.

The status of translators has long been under pressure from a number of fronts. Externally, there is pressure from those outside the industry who view translation as a low-skilled enterprise. Dam and Zethsen's study (2008a, 93) found that both translators and non-translators perceived translation as a "low-status occupation", which Katan attributed to the conduit metaphor of language as a "static conveyor of meaning" (2011, 147) and Gouadec linked to the perceived parallels between translation and secretarial work (2007, 245). These negative – or neutral (at best) – perceptions of translators and what translation involves can only have a negative impact on perceptions of appropriate remuneration among the uninitiated. Internally, passive acceptance of this perception among translators perpetuates low status due largely to the helplessness of practitioners to change the status quo (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). In Dam and Zethsen's (2010) wider study of over 2,000 Danish translators (with Denmark according considerable regulatory protection to translators, it should be noted), translators were aware of their external perception as 'non-experts', despite their training and the nature of their work clearly refuting this view. This awareness clashes with internal perceptions of self-worth (evident from a cursory glance through translators' social media presence). Translators are generally conscious of their poor external image compared to other professions requiring similar levels of training and qualification. That said, the discrepancy in status even between translators and conference interpreters is highlighted by Gentile's studies, which found that 56.5% of conference interpreters – the "stars" of the translation profession (Dam and Zethsen 2013) – "relate their status to that of medical doctors and university lecturers" (Gentile 2013, 75). However, public service interpreters were viewed more as a "semi-profession" with a status closer to that of nurses (Gentile 2016). Katan's earlier survey data showed that large numbers of translators and interpreters (50% of all responses) likened their status to teachers and secretaries ahead of lawyers, architects, or doctors (Katan 2009, 199).

However, this is a catch-22: because rates are lower than seemingly 'equivalent' professions, remuneration perpetuates an on-going perception of a low-status profession to external clients. Combine this with the dearth of regulatory protection accorded to the 'translator' title in most jurisdictions and the precarity of employment in the translation industry and it becomes clear that perceptions alone – deflated further by poor signalling – play a significant role in pulling down the rates that clients are willing to pay and translators are comfortable to charge.

2.2. Disruptors

The second key factor is the wide range of disruptors to the industry in terms of the new ways in which "translations are […] being commissioned, produced, and used" and the "resulting uncertainty and shockwaves across the industry" (Drugan 2013, 6). The most obvious disruptor is the ever-growing influence of translation technology. Opinions on technologies such as machine translation (MT) are still mixed among practitioners (Läubli and Orrego-Carmona 2017; Nunes Vieira 2020), but its disruptive influence cannot be ignored and has had a knock-on effect on industry procurement models. Prices have been driven downwards due to translators having to compete with the availability of free MT-generated translations. Deadlines are being squeezed due to instantaneous MT and shorter post-editing timescales. Quality expectations are also changing, as clients inevitably compare the functional quality of free, instant MT output with the significantly higher cost and timescale of human translation, in some cases with minimal quality differences to the untrained eye.

A second, more recent disruptor is the rise of the platform economy. Connecting clients with service providers and offering ready-made marketplaces and tools to mediate and facilitate these relationships, platforms harness large-scale networks to monopolise specific segments of markets. This is often referred to as Uberisation, whereby “employment [is] fundamentally *individualized* so that the costs of labour […] are pushed onto the employee with the help of labour-on-demand business models, self-employment, portfolio careers and zero-hours contracts” (Fleming 2017, 692), a practice markedly affecting the so-called ‘precariat’ (Moorkens 2017, 465). Uberisation has received little attention in TS, despite the far-reaching changes to the ways in which translations are sourced. Fırat’s (2021) work is the only dedicated study in this area thus far alongside passing (albeit non-explicit) references to broadly Uberising trends (Moorkens 2020a; Olohan 2017), especially in the context of crowdsourcing (see Jiménez-Crespo 2017, 58ff, inter alia).

Popular platforms also offer a quasi-legitimate forum for amateur translators to join the body of practising translators and offer cheaper rates, further competing with professional translators who look to charge more. Due to the lack of clearly-defined boundaries (see Koskinen and Dam 2016), non-professional translation is a prominent area of concern. In a 2017 survey (European Commission 2017, 25), 28% (the largest proportion) called for a “more regulated market in terms of pricing and access to the profession”. Research on translator perceptions of crowdsourcing shows that such initiatives do little to help public perceptions of translation work and, in fact, make non-professional translators more visible than professionals (Flanagan 2016). Flanagan did, however, suggest that the data supported non-professionals and professionals co-existing without competing with one another by catering for different markets. The common distinction is ‘bulk’ versus ‘premium’ translation services, with the premium market allowing skilled human translators to command higher prices for quality-focused work, and the bulk market offering a comparatively low-cost, “quick and dirty” solution dependent on technology (Bowker 2020, 269). For the bulk and premium markets to co-exist, the distinctions between the two groups need to be better signalled and the Uber-esque platforms will need to distinguish more carefully between the needs and expectations of professionals and non-professionals in these different contexts.

As a result of a number of mergers and acquisitions, the third major disruptor is the emergence of extremely large, geographically-diffuse super-LSPs handling a large proportion of translation work globally. However, smaller LSPs can still compete with super-LSPs. The Nimdzi 100 Report shows that the top 100 LSPs account for only 14.5% of the industry’s total revenue (Nimdzi 2020, 22), but the super-LSPs have a powerful marketing advantage in capturing clients and projects. Their vast size grants far greater purchasing power and leaves freelancers with a choice between LSP-mediated work at a lower rate and a higher-risk strategy of potentially intermittent direct-client work at higher rates. This struggle is particularly apparent for newcomers to the profession, especially when their ability to discuss rates in public forums is largely silenced by regulation or convention (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3).

Collectively, poor perceptions of the profession and disruptors create a perfect storm of generally downward pressure on remuneration. As Moorkens and Rocchi insightfully observe: “The translation industry in general appears to consider business ethics subordinate to the profit motive and receives little push-back from translators, who are often not in a position to maximise their agency due to disparities of power” (2020, 333). The inevitable corollary of these factors – and the low status that they at least passively abet – is rates of pay not commensurate with comparably qualified and trained professions. The market is, however, highly fragmented and segmented along geographical, competence, and quality lines, the most notable being the aforementioned distinction between the bulk and premium markets. Nonetheless, rates of pay cannot improve without change to other areas of the translation industry.

3. ‘Educators’

A vital concern is the push-pull relationship between low pay, poor perceptions and understandings of the industry, and the bodies involved in supplying, training, representing, and researching translations and translators. In his exploration of the ecosystem of demand and supply for language services, DePalma (2020) offers a list of ‘educators’ that assist or enable the success of language industry suppliers. This categorisation provides a useful framework to examine the ways in which key stakeholders feed into, drive, and shape these perceptions and understandings, and also helps to pinpoint where information on rates comes from or can be changed. DePalma’s list includes industry associations, academic and research institutions, investors, market research, news, and blogs, and we adapt this framework to add the “humans at the center” (2020, 365); he groups freelancers and LSPs here under the heading of “The Supply”. The sections below cover academic institutions, individual translators, and industry associations as the key supply-side stakeholders in DePalma’s model over which translators and translation scholars can realistically hope to have a meaningful influence. DePalma’s “technology foundation” has been omitted as, although these technologies indirectly affect rates and status, there is less control over developments in this area from within the translation industry. The same can arguably be said of LSPs as freelance translators often work in hierarchical structures that limit such power (Moorkens 2017, 467), a relationship we comment on below. Due to space constraints and the complex, porous, and interdependent relationship between these stakeholders, the discussions are not exhaustive, but rather uncover a range of formal and informal channels and direct and indirect ways in which these ‘educators’ influence rate-setting and explore various ways in which translators are professionally, socially, and even legally constrained in their price-setting practices.

3.1. Academic institutions

As established in the introduction, rate-setting is rarely covered in TS literature, and it frequently remains a peripheral element of training. Guerberof Arenas and Moorkens (2019, 232) discuss the importance of teaching students how to negotiate with clients within the context of post-editing and the contemporary realities of the profession, and the EMT competence framework points to the importance of rates being taught, including rates within the context of service provision (European Master's in Translation Network 2017, 11). In the classroom, this may manifest itself as advice to students that their rates are 'too high/low' or '(un)realistic', or that they are 'underselling themselves', and yet, based on the authors' experience of teaching on undergraduate and postgraduate courses in translation across a wide range of UK-based higher education institutions, specific examples of appropriate pricing levels are rarely offered.

Of course, even if we were to add systematic coverage of rate-setting to the translation classroom, this guidance would only reach a narrow proportion of professional translators given the unregulated nature of the profession. Indeed, translation-specific degrees are far from a prerequisite for professional practice: Inbox Translation (2020) report that only 25% of respondents had a postgraduate degree in translation. Moreover, previously unpublished data from the same survey suggests that translators with a postgraduate degree in translation can only charge a small amount more than those with no degree, although the statistics are far from convincing. While the rates charged by those with 'no formal degree' to those with a 'postgraduate qualification in translation' point to a median uplift between as little as £0.001 and £0.033, depending on the client and text type, the difference is not sufficient in any case to be considered statistically significant, calling into doubt the extent to which qualifications can indeed secure an increase in rates of pay. Chan (2009) reported that (even non-translation) degrees are the most important element for employers in determining translator employability. He found that, when given a choice, "75% of the respondents said that they preferred an English degree to translator certification" (2009, 165), though he went on to note that this was partly down to "respondents' ignorance or misconception of translation certification". Nonetheless, respondents relayed a generally positive attitude towards associations who offer these qualifications. Despite noting that academic qualifications are "of less market value as signals than […] verifiable previous experience", Pym, Orrego-Carmona, and Torres-Simon still regard them as one of the core signalling mechanisms feeding professional status (2016, 51).

Even with relatively little direct guidance on rate-setting, training can inculcate and feed status and offers a potentially powerful medium to shape future understandings of rates, typically through indirect channels (see Section 4). Though direct engagement with rates on courses can take place, universities cannot intervene in markets, and the mere acquisition of a translation-specific degree is not enough to guarantee higher rates. Academic institutions and academics can still make considerable progress in aligning the aims of research, training, and practice but this is far from the sole factor in defining rates. Mirroring the brief insight from the Inbox Translation data above, Ruokonen and Mäkisalo found that Finnish professional translators' "backgrounds and qualifications fail to produce statistically significant differences" (2018, 1) in perceptions of status, suggesting that other factors are at work. Though this discussion reasserts the interdependence of these educators, there is also a subtle hierarchy emerging. Academic training undoubtedly feeds into the practice of translators, and can also influence the practices of the associations, yet they arguably rely upon associations and translators to elicit change more directly.

3.2. Individual translators

Next, we consider how translators themselves frame and relate to this bilateral dynamic between rates and status. In a few clicks, translators can access an approximate rate for their language pair and domain. ProZ.com, for instance, offers one of the more visible rate resources, drawn from their vast community of freelancers and LSPs. While rates are infrequently shared via social media, it is difficult to pinpoint how deep this engagement runs without more a detailed, empirical study. However, a survey of 188 (mostly freelance) translators reported that over 40% of respondents use social media to "share good practice" and almost 79% to "exchange with other translators", and a cursory glance at postings shows that critiques of low-paying clients are a feature of this discourse (Loock 2020). Survey data also confirm that translators consider rates to be one of the most pressing ethical issues translators face (Inbox Translation 2020; ITI 2020; McDonough Dolmaya 2011, 38).

However, coordinated efforts to improve pay and conditions are lacking due to issues of agency, audience, and professional fragmentation, and concerns remain that translators fuel the low status of the profession. Jemielity (2018, 535) discusses a potential ideological and behavioural "disconnect" between translator and businessperson cultures, pointing to a translatorial "poverty cult" characterised by an "economically unambitious, arguably anti-capitalist approach". While Moorkens (2020b, 328) questions the image of the "highly specialized, business-savvy translator as an exemplar of financial and professional success", rightly noting that not all translators follow this path – and not only because of a lack of ambition – this trait would nevertheless be a key factor in the freelance translator's economic marginalisation if it enabled other industry partners to take advantage of this economic apathy. The ATC UK Language Services Industry Survey and Report 2021, for instance, comments on the wide range of profit margins across LSPs selling translations, ranging from 20% to 77% (with an average of 47.1%), while the 2022 European Language Industry

Survey reported that 75% of LSPs surveyed are prioritising growth (EUATC 2022), making it clear that maximising profits is an unashamedly key aim among LSPs (ATC and Nimdzi 2021).

Along with questions of ambition (and business savvy), there is also the issue of secrecy and incomplete information sharing. Drugan notes (2013, 20) that many translators will not divulge rates and there are factors behind this reluctance beyond potential concerns over client confidentiality and confusion relating to anti-competition laws (see Section 3.3). Despite money's importance in our daily lives, it has long been a deeply entrenched, trans-generational taboo topic in many cultures (Alsemgeest 2014, 522). And just as there is often a social stigma attached to disclosing income, the same stigma can be attached to the sharing of rates between translators. Jenner and Jenner state that "[f]or many linguists, pricing is a touchy subject that they do not want to discuss in detail, because it seems too – well, business-like" (2010, 110).

Whether owing to concerns over collusion, 'keeping cards close to one's chest', or a reluctance to break taboos, more open discussions of rates among translators can certainly influence understandings of value within the profession and subsequently feed into the wider issues of status and vice-versa, reinforcing this two-way stream. The evidence suggests that money remains a marginal topic of discussion despite its importance to the ongoing health of the profession, and it is still incredibly difficult to ascertain how much fellow translators charge. Averages and minimum-maximum ranges are relatively abundant, but the scales are often so wide (or the datasets so small and/or hard to verify) that their utility is fairly minimal. These summary statistics also typically fail to account for the necessarily-connected economic factors that feed into price formation (specialisms, language pairs, location, personal needs, and desires, etc.). Yet the blame should by no means be aimed squarely at translators. While the wider translation industry seemingly works to the 1970s business mantra that "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits" (Friedman 2007), as suggested by the ATC and Nimdzi reports above, translators themselves see their ability to determine rates and to follow economic interests severely limited. Client and LSP pressure on translators to lower their rates is a prominent issue, with Nunes Vieira suggesting that "alternative forms of management and ownership merit future debate and exploration" (2020, 16), including greater control over the process and communication with end-clients. Though a laudable suggestion, as noted above, freelance translators often see their power limited (Moorkens 2017, 467), with LSPs typically serving both end client and vendors as a gatekeeper in the procedural chain. Once again, a paradoxical interdependency comes to light. Though translators *can* access clients directly, their access is regularly mediated by LSPs and their power limited by client perceptions even when direct access is an option. Ultimately, change will require engagement with buyers of translations, and this 'educational' channel is perhaps most easily accessed through industry associations, by using their power to influence LSP practices directly or shaping client understandings of translation.

3.3. Industry Associations

Building upon the arguments above, the final ‘educator’ is translation industry associations. In the UK, there are numerous associations that promote the work of translators and represent the industry. Though in other countries guilds, unions, and cooperatives may play a greater role, these bodies are not particularly prominent in the UK. A National Union of Professional Interpreters and Translators does exist (part of Unite, the UK’s largest trade union), but membership levels are low. As such, despite its purported role fighting for reasonable working conditions and rates and offering legal protection for members, these tasks are largely taken up by prominent associations with larger member bases, such as the Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI) and the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL). ITI, for instance, claims to act as “an interface between government, industry and commerce, the media, and the general public” (2022), emphasising their role as a voice for individual translators.

At a basic level, the link between association membership and rate-setting is potentially striking. Returning to the Inbox Translation data, we see that “[m]embers of professional associations charge on average 30% more than freelance translators who are not members of professional translation associations – both when using the mean and median averages” (2020) and, though the relationship between these associations, rates, and the professionals they represent is contingent upon balancing a range of often divergent interests, this link is enough to warrant an exploration of the role these bodies play. Jemielity (2018, 536) provocatively suggests that “[t]ranslators might be perceived as more businesslike (and less ‘poetic’) if they aligned themselves more closely with the expectations, codes and language of the business world” and these bodies represent a potent site to achieve just that with one important initial caveat to consider. While the wide range of contexts in which translators work problematises specific rate impositions, the associations’ ability to tackle rate calculations directly is stifled by potential legal issues, which are clearly felt in the context of surveys. While surveys are widespread among translation associations and LSPs, and regularly touch upon the issue of rates, they often avoid delving into finer-grained detail as, across many geographical areas, rate-related questioning must adhere to relevant legislation. For instance, the Société française des traducteurs (SFT) follows the French Commercial Code’s provisions on pricing and competition, while the American Translators Association (ATA) rate policy was adapted following an investigation by the US Federal Trade Commission in the early 1990s. No penalties were imposed in that case, but the FTC later ruled that the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) had acted illegally when publishing minimum rates that members must charge in the US in a separate case (Federal Trade Commission 1997). In the UK too, the ITI requires members not to attempt to control markets (ITI 2013) and to adhere to the Competition Act. These rulings explicitly prohibit members from engaging in any price fixing, significantly undermining opportunities for associations to share rate-setting information or good practice. This blanket imposition has caused considerable discontent among some translators who argue that these rulings further marginalise translators and enable (super-)LSPs to drive down rates by using this ban to their advantage (Rosado 2016). Though a contentious viewpoint, this is partly corroborated in wider market data. Indeed, in 2019, the top 20 LSPs grew by 10%, the top 100 by 12%, and LSPs with revenues between $50-$90 million grew by 22%, and larger companies consistently outperformed the market (European Commission 2020; Nimdzi 2020) while income and volume of work have decreased for a significant proportion of freelance translators during this same period (CSA Research 2020). Although the COVID-19 pandemic is a mitigating factor, rate stagnation and downward trends in prices (European Commission 2020, 14) suggest that these wider developments are not a temporary occurrence, potentially linking the lack of coverage of rates to wider issues of association interests and information asymmetry. Indeed, the Finnish Association of Translators and Interpreters (SKTL) regularly organises training about rates and publishes data in the association's periodical Kääntäjä-Översättaren (with a short embargo) while still complying with legislation, and it seems that bodies such as the UK-based Association of Translation Companies (ATC), which represents LSPs rather than translators, are not held to the same legal standards in terms of rates. In their 2019 industry report, for instance, they report specific average translation rates charged by LSPs (ATC and Nimdzi 2019).

Another clear way in which translation associations have sought to mirror wider business practices is the use of codes of ethics. It is well documented that these codes are limited on several levels, repeating general professional guidelines while presenting an incomplete, unenforceable, and sometimes unrealistic image of translation (Baixauli-Olmos 2020, 309; Lambert 2018; McDonough Dolmaya 2011, 45). Nevertheless, they undoubtedly offer a veneer of professionalism and provide a useful means of assessing associations' (minimal) engagement with rate-setting. Rates are only mentioned in half of sampled codes (Lambert 2022 forthcoming), and are primarily addressed by loose references to 'fairness'. One association that does offer additional guidance on rates is the SFT: "[translators] shall be remunerated according to their level of experience, training and expertise, the complexity of the work to be translated, the amount of research required, the deadlines to be met, and any expenses, investments and costs that may be incurred" (2011, our translation). This rare exception offers a glimpse of the ways in which codes can begin to unpack rate-setting and provides an interesting counterpoint to the suggestion that these documents are not the appropriate place to discuss rates. Overall, the ethical dimensions of rate-setting and reporting, and the tension between translators' sense of a 'duty to serve' and protecting their own interests merit further attention, but fall beyond the scope of this article.

Supplementary literature available on association websites can also offer further insights into rate-setting. Many translation associations offer guides to buying translations, which have the potential to disseminate more nuanced information. *Translation: Getting it Right*, published in ten languages by leading associations worldwide (including the ITI), contains a section entitled "How much will it cost?", for example. While the inter-association collaboration is commendable, the content itself is unfortunately vague. After noting that costs range from "1 to 10 (or even 100)", the guide asks some potentially relevant questions ("How many pages can a translator produce in an hour? How much time do you expect him or her to spend crafting the text that will promote your product or service?") without offering any answers (Durban and ITI 2014). A more concerted effort to provide consistent, visible guidelines on rate-setting across associational boundaries could be a powerful mechanism for change, using their dual audience to educate both suppliers and clients on the challenges of translation and key factors to consider when setting prices. But the fragmented nature of these associations and their visibility undoubtedly limits signalling at this level. Indeed, associations are arguably not well known enough within the translation world, let alone to the wider public (see Chan 2013, 214).

Finally, many associations (in the UK and beyond) offer workshops on a range of topics including rates. A review of workshops and training materials available from the two largest UK-based translator associations, the CIOL and ITI, at the time of writing reveal a small number of free and £35.00 'mini-workshops' by the CIOL. The ITI has an 'Online Shop' selling webinars for £10.00-20.00 for non-members (£0.00-£12.50 for members). At the opposite end of the spectrum, the CIOL advertises a two-day 'professional skills' workshop at a cost of £300 for members (£350 for non-members), while the ITI offers 'Short Courses' at £96-138 for members (£144-174 for non-members). Though commendable in their offerings of free and low-cost training materials, access to the full archive of resources (186 recorded webinars available via the CIOL, for example, at the time of writing) is paywalled for member categories only. When coupled with the prices of membership, applications, and assessments (see Table 1), such training often becomes prohibitively expensive, serving as a barrier to entry for many, and potentially raises the spectre of tensions between association profit and added value to translators. Indeed, there is a palpable irony in associations' generating significant income from event fees charged to translators who, they acknowledge, are poorly paid and have limited business acumen, requiring these translators to pay for the privilege of finding out why they are underpaid and struggling to make ends meet.

Category Type		CIOL*	ITI**
CIOL	*ITI*		
Student Affiliate	Student	Free	£49.00
Study Affiliate	n/a	£27.00	n/a
Career Affiliate	n/a	£90.00	n/a
Associate	Affiliate	£131.00	£110.00
Member	Qualified Member	£143.00	£235.00
Fellow	Qualified Fellow	£170.00	£235.00

Miscellaneous one-off costs:

*CIOL: Application Fee £25.00

** ITI: Application Fee £60.00; Qualified Translator/Interpreter Assessment Fee £389.00 per language pair

Table 1. CIOL and ITI annual cost of membership as of 10 May 2022

More so than other educators, there is a clear sense that efforts are being made among translation associations to document and discuss rates. Though the impact of these attempts is often unclear, due to internal interests and external pressures, there is limited evidence in the Inbox Translation survey of correlation between higher rates and association membership. However, the data are not robust enough to ascertain whether this stems from associational activity itself or whether it is somewhat illusory, with more committed, financially-secure professional translators making up the member bases surveyed. Indeed, the SFT report confirms that, despite a sizeable proportion of members finding additional work through the association, there was no difference in satisfaction with overall turnover between members and non-members, with half of respondents satisfied in both cases (SFT 2016, 22-23). Pym (2017, 367), meanwhile, poignantly draws attention to the blurred lines of causation at work here:

> [w]hen members of the Société Française des Traducteurs report earning higher rates of pay than non-members […], it could be because membership gives them an added advantage in the marketplace, which would explain why they pay to be members. At the same time, though, it could be that only the higher-paid translators have enough disposable income to *become* members.

Of course, factors such as ambition and prospective or desired income are not part of the calculation and therefore limit insight once again. Ultimately, association affiliation is far from a panacea for guarding against issues with rates. Across the various resources on offer we see a passive acceptance of some issues, a willing absence of consideration in other areas, and an occasional outright inability to elicit change.

4. Discussion

Status clearly lies at the heart of many remuneration issues for translators, and the aforementioned educators can each play a role in shaping attitudes towards translator status, and in turn remuneration. Figure 1 captures the complex interaction between the direct and indirect channels influencing rates and the wider, underlying factors affecting rates in the translation industry. The white circles (‘Clients’, ‘LSPs’, and ‘Individual Translators’) are entities with, we argue, *direct* influence over rates, in terms of the rates being sought and either accepted or rejected, while the dark circles (‘Academic Institutions’ and ‘Industry Associations’) embody entities with *indirect* influence over rate-setting.

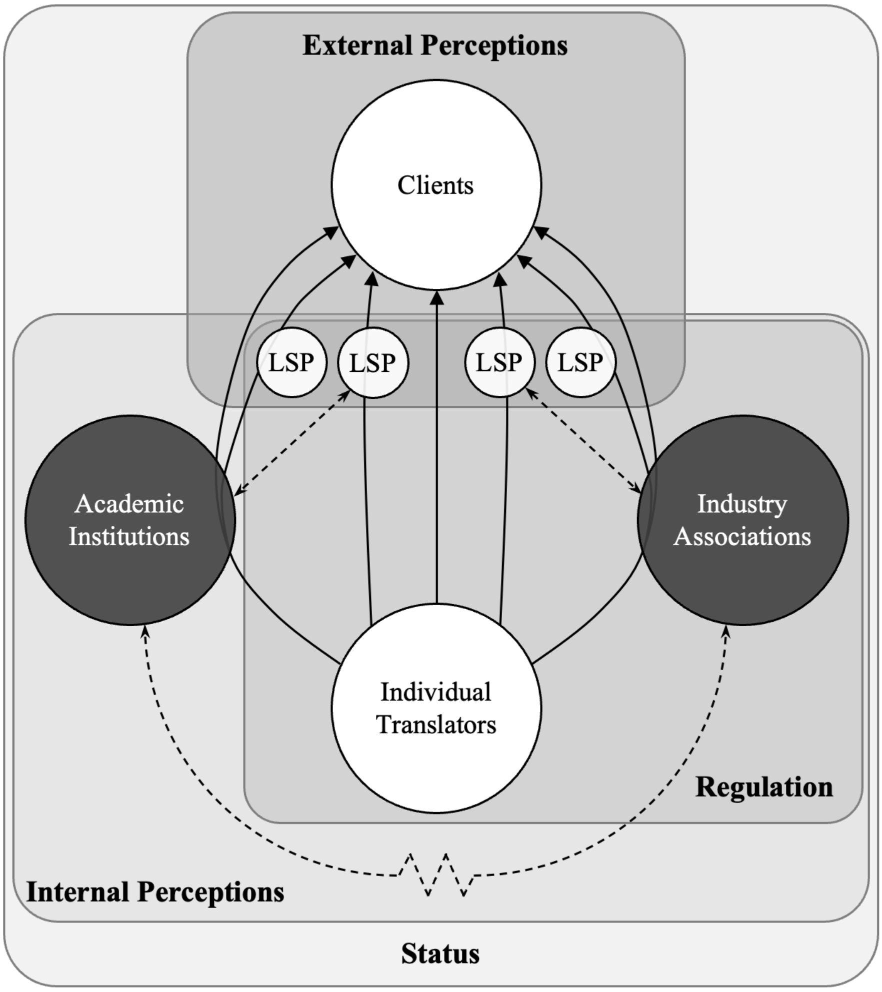

Figure 1. Direct and indirect channels of influencing rates and underlying drivers

As the diagram shows, individual translators have direct access to clients and indirect access via LSPs without formal training or accreditation, and can therefore play a role in setting and negotiating rates. Equally, translators can ‘pass through’ academic institutions (via formal academic qualifications) and/or industry associations (via membership and/or professional qualifications) before making contact with clients directly or indirectly via LSPs. Figure 1 also captures the hierarchy of influence among these entities with direct influence over rates. Clients and the market at large arguably have the greatest influence on rate-setting, followed by LSPs, and then translators. Translators have extremely limited agency as individuals with respect to both internal and external perceptions and, with many still encumbered by taboos surrounding rates, self-perpetuating "poverty cults", and powerlessness in the face of growing LSPs and disruptive technology, there is seemingly little that individuals can do to improve their status beyond trying to improve the perceptions of singular clients and receptive project managers.

The LSPs play a complex role in this landscape, constituting both supply and demand and acting, in many respects, as gatekeepers and influencers of rates. However, their interaction with academic institutions and industry associations is mixed (hence the dashed arrows in Figure 1). Only some LSPs engage with associations via corporate membership, surveys, and other outreach and training activities. LSP interaction with academic institutions is, meanwhile, rather limited. Academic institutions can and do play a role in improving status, but their role is limited to an indirect influence. Research articles such as this one do little to reach the stakeholders that matter in this push for improved status, so there needs to be greater collaboration between academic institutions and industry associations and far greater evidence of the impact of academic research into the sociology and economics of the translation profession. Some progress has been made in this regard (e.g., collaborative research with the CIOL and the ITI Research Network), but the gap between the academy and the profession is still relatively wide. On the teaching side, increased collaboration could concretise mechanisms for professionalisation (and allow what we teach to filter through more easily to the profession), perhaps via an "international system of professional certification of translators" (Pym 2020, 17), but progress is hard-won. Discussing the TransCert project, which brought together stakeholders in the translation sector in a bid for Europe-wide translator certification, Pym (ibid., 18) laments how initiatives have "run aground on the rocky shores where industry meets academia, where there is amazingly little mutual trust." Nevertheless, a similar initiative was alluded to by the CIOL in their response to a call for evidence on the recognition of professional qualifications and the regulation of professions. Interestingly, they signalled the need for a clear national framework of regulation as a beneficial strategy that runs *parallel to* more equitable pay rather than something that could be *embedded within* any proposed regulation:

> A clear national framework would help both the supply and demand side and enable a clearer career path for linguists – which along with fairer pay – would improve the pipeline of linguistic talent which is currently insufficient to meet the needs of public services and business. (CIOL 2020)

Ultimately, despite the limited proportion of translators pursuing academic qualifications, formal training still plays an important role in quasi-regulation and the formation of practical and socio-economic know-how. As Guerberof Arenas and Moorkens note, translation programmes "need to constantly adapt to the industry and modify their syllabi so that students are well-prepared to face the professional world" (2019, 232). In part, this is already being addressed through student work placements and the growing prevalence of modules on translation technology, ethics, and project management.

The rounded rectangles in Figure 1 ('Status', 'Internal Perceptions', 'External Perceptions', and 'Regulation'), meanwhile, represent sociological phenomena that influence rate-setting. Regulation plays little-to-no role in the UK translation industry. Regulatory standards are upheld informally and inconsistently by industry associations via various membership criteria, codes of ethics, and labels such as the CIOL's 'Chartered Linguist' designation and by LSPs who require certain qualifications or experience. But unlike other countries (in Denmark, for instance, where the designation *translatør* is protected; see Dam and Zethsen 2010, 196), there is no regulatory protection accorded to the 'translator' title in the UK. If regulation were to feature more prominently in the UK, it would only likely have an influence over the individual translators and LSPs in terms of providing some formalised justification for higher rates compared with 'non-professional' translators, for instance, unless the associations were to engage in concerted client-awareness campaigns to raise the status of the profession among the wider public. Academic institutions can help to reinforce regulation, as covered above, and can also influence policy-making to a degree, but associations in the UK come closest to providing some form of established regulatory framework, in terms of membership, professional accreditation, codes of ethics, and advocacy initiatives.

Internal perceptions concern how individual translators (and to a degree LSPs, academic institutions and industry associations) view translators' professional status. While translators tend to value themselves relatively highly, internal perceptions count for little in terms of impact on pay if they do not align with external perceptions of status, which lie primarily with the end clients. Translators might think themselves worthy of the highest rates, but it matters little if the client's view is different, especially if other translators are offering, to the untrained eye, the same service at a lower rate, or even free in the case of MT (a reminder of the persistent information asymmetry at work in the translation industry).

All of these sociological phenomena are instrumental in the overarching conceptualisation of the status accorded to translators. Hence, the one direct educator (individual translators), combined with the two indirect educators ('academic institutions' and 'industry associations'), contribute directly to clients' wider understanding of what translation is, what it involves, and, most importantly, *what it is worth*. Its worth is directly and intrinsically connected with status, which is in turn shaped by regulation of the profession (or lack thereof) and the competing internal and external perceptions of those with a stake in the translation process. We contend that, although the influence can only be relatively indirect, the primary onus therefore falls to translator associations to effect change. This is by no means an attempt to minimise the potential contribution of academia or to ‘pass the buck’ to associations. Impactful research in the academic sphere (in particular in collaboration with associations) can help to uncover evidence of pressing economic, sociological, and praxeological phenomena in the industry and offer the necessary time, resources, and expertise to drive and legitimise new initiatives. However, it is through the associations that individual translators are coordinated (at least, more so than via any other channel), that impactful research is disseminated to the profession via reports and conferences, that the industry is subject to quasi-regulation (and can be regulated more strictly), and that outreach initiatives to the business and political world can be initiated via the media, trade shows, seminars, and lobbying. They may be under-resourced and held back by their fragmentary nature and idiosyncratic (often financial) pressures and interests, but it is here where the nexus of power is concentrated.

5. Concluding remarks

There are arguably two main channels that can be harnessed to buoy status and, in turn, rates. The more formal channel – regulation of the profession – is a more difficult goal to achieve and to enforce, even on a national scale, but the ‘softer’ approach – changing external and internal perceptions of the profession – is likely to have a greater impact on attitudes towards remuneration. However, it is difficult to pinpoint whether external and internal perceptions are the cause or a symptom of lower status. It is for this reason that a stronger educational role is necessary: not only to raise the perceptions of those inside the industry, giving translators the confidence and sense of self-worth to command higher rates, but also to raise the perceptions of those outside the industry. Both aims would of course be supported by better regulation, but the feasibility of this approach is in question without wholesale collaboration and coordination between associations. If the wider status of the translation profession can be raised, this improvement will begin to reinforce regulatory initiatives and feed back into perceptions of status and, in turn, to improve conditions and rates of pay for translators, who frequently feel undervalued and underpaid in their work.

At the end of the Inbox Translation survey, respondents were asked “If you could change one thing not currently under your control, that would make your life as a freelance translator better, what would that be?” 132 of the 555 (23.8%) respondents replied with comments relating to rates, significantly outranking the next most popular responses (workflow/volume (11.5%) and recognition and respect (10.5%)). Indeed, one striking comment was a desire to “[know] what other translators charge so I have more confidence to push for a pay rise with my clients!” While the path to improved status and rates is fraught with obstacles, there are some signs of change and resistance to external downward pressures. In a pleasing case of interaction between academic and association voices, OTTIAQ President Donald Barabé argued that increased professional regulation can improve the status of translation, briefly alluding to the knock-on effect this can have on rates, demonstrating that associations are taking these issues seriously (Barabé 2021, 180). Elsewhere, the 2020 Nimdzi 100 report (Nimdzi 2020, 34) noted that, despite cuts to public sector spending on translation, Swedish LSP Semantix pulled out of an $82 million interpreting contract due to price pressure, and UK LSP thebigword announced a forthcoming price increase for its customers. It also reported protests and strike action in Denmark over low rates and new conditions of service under an $80 million Ministry of Justice contract. As such, there are some encouraging signs of push-back from certain LSPs who are working to protect stakeholders' interests in the face of the growing price pressure, but how much of this resistance filters through to individual translators remains to be seen. LSPs must ensure that improved rates are not simply channelled into their own already-growing profits, but are passed on to the translators who are responsible for fulfilling the core work at the heart of these large-scale contracts. Change is perhaps afoot, and can be buoyed by the efforts of the educators discussed above, but much remains to be done before we can speak of professional translators achieving a status and remuneration commensurate with their role.

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