Online Translators in Online Language Assessments

Ana Nino Alonso (Ana.M.Nino@manchester.ac.uk)
The University of Manchester, UK

Abstract

This pedagogic research explores the use of online translators by language students in online language assessments. Drawing on research findings on the current use of online translators for educational and communicative purposes, we have investigated their use in summative assessments in the online language teaching and learning context. Variables such as type of assessment (i.e. based on oral or written production or a mix of skills, including translation), language being studied, language level, and plagiarism detection system were cross-referenced to scrutinize the perceived impact that this tool has on online language learning assessment, the possible reasons behind, the most affected language levels/language learners and assessment types, and, ultimately, the pedagogical implications this may have for the future of language learning and teaching beyond the class. Finally, some reflections follow on how to improve practice on online language assessment, and also on the pedagogical value of online machine translation tools.

Keywords: online translators, online assessment, foreign language teaching and learning, plagiarism detection

Introduction

Higher education and secondary education institutions have experienced unprecedented growth in online teaching and learning since the start of the Coronavirus pandemic (Gallagher, 2020). There has also been a recent increase in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) (McKendrick, 2021) and a shift in the way language teaching and assessments are conducted (Snelling, 2022, Polisca et al. 2022). From asynchronous virtual learning to synchronous online or hybrid teaching and ever-increasing new tools to assess languages, provide feedback and consult online reference tools, we are currently negotiating the way of a new normal reality that is likely to remain and develop in the coming years. Online translators are part and parcel of this new reality and their use for language learning purposes is still controversial, especially during online summative assessments. A particularly pertinent issue in this regard is academic dishonesty. Some argue that the use of online translators does not truly reflect learning, whereas others consider them valuable online tools that, with proper guidance, can assist learners in the process of language learning.

This study describes some of the main uses of online machine translation tools, commenting on the pedagogical value of these, and presents the results of an online survey that investigated language teachers' perceptions of the impact that online language teaching and assessment may have on the use of online translators and its connection with plagiarism detection tools such as *Turnitin* and with other online language reference tools.

Finally, some reflections and recommendations will follow on good online teaching and assessment practices and the implementation of online translators in the online language class.

Online translators in language teaching, learning, and assessment

This section revises literature on the use of online translators as language learning tools, their pedagogical value, their controversial use by students in online assessments, and their link with academic integrity.

Online Translators: language learning tools and pedagogical value

Niño (2009, p. 242) identified four main uses of machine translation for educational purposes: MT as a bad model, MT as a good model, vocational use (making use of pre/post-editing skills, translation quality assessment, and CAT tools), and MT as CALL tool. In this section we will provide some examples of how machine translation, and, in particular, online translators, have been used for these particular purposes before and after 2016 which is the year in which machine translation (MT) has evolved into its latest neural MT form[1], considerably improving the speed, quality, and accuracy of its output.

Much of the research in this field has focused on the use of MT as a bad model, i.e. using MT's imperfect output as input for error detection and correction tasks. There are various pedagogical advantages to this language practice. For example, Somers (2003, p. 327) stated that engaging language learners in spotting machine translation errors can help them "learn about subtle language differences" and "strengthen learners' understanding of mother tongue and second language grammar and style".

In the translation industry, this MT output error detection and correction practice is known as MT post-editing. Training is usually needed to familiarize translators with the most common MT errors and to learn to correct them appropriately depending on the expected quality of the final output text. Niño (2004) took this activity to the language class. After an introduction to MT and its frequent error types, she presented advanced language students with an English into Spanish general text post-editing activity and evidenced how this practice can help improve lexical and grammatical accuracy as well as stylistic correctness. At the lower levels of the language learning scale, García and Pena (2011) found out that MT output can help beginners and early intermediate students to communicate more and better. He also acknowledged that in MT post-editing there seems to be "more effort required" as compared to writing directly into the L2. This extra effort that the students put in involves translation, text editing, and written production skills in one single activity, thus enhancing the language learning experience.

There are not many studies on the use of CAT (Computer-Aided Translation)[2] for language learning purposes. A good example is Fernández-Parra (2016) who

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[1] Neural MT (NMT) is a form of end-to-end learning architecture used to automate translation. In NMT, the program's neural network encodes and decodes the source text as opposed to running a set of predefined syntactic, lexical and semantic rules from the start and has been shown to produce better quality results.

[2] Computer Aided Translation (CAT) is the software (e.g. translation memories and termbases) used by professional translators. These consist of a large multilingual databases with aligned phrases and

experimented with CAT tools as additional language learning tools. In particular, she experimented with translation memory and alignment tools, and with terminology management databases or termbases. She advises that CAT tools are especially suitable for technical translation because their output contains considerable amounts of lexical repetition, and this can help reinforce learning. Contrary to Fernández-Parra's position that CAT tools can contribute to enhancing the language learning experience, Kazemzadeh and Fard Kashani's (2014) study concluded that while CAT aids beginners to write with less effort, more learning does not necessarily take place.

In the language learning context, the use of online translators such as *Google Translate* at lower levels where students are still learning the main structures and their first words in the language can be contentious. Valijärvi and Tarsoly's (2019) study on the use of *Google Translate* by beginner's students for language learning purposes concluded that, although its use helps them to experiment with the target language more freely, it may "hinder the development of analytical skills" (2019, p. 71), which is key when learning a language. However, they also formulated some examples for the use of online translators in class e.g., letting the students articulate their own linguistic rules (2019, p. 64).

Measuring the impact of online translators on foreign language writing constitutes a new trend in this research field. O´Neill has done quite a few investigations in this area and some of the conclusions he reached were that online translators' use may improve students' writing performance on certain features such as comprehensibility, content, grammar, and spelling (O'Neill 2019). He also stressed the importance of training the students to use online translators. Students who used *Google Translate* after training scored the highest (of all 5 groups he investigated) on both experimental writing tasks, followed by those who used online dictionaries without prior training (O'Neill 2019). Some examples of his valuable suggestions to introduce training on the use of *Google Translate* in the language class can be found at http://goo.gl/xDBzFU

Enkin (2016) also embraces the idea of training students on the use of online translators and suggested activities that could be carried out by highlighting and reinforcing patterns of both the L2 (advanced Spanish) and the grammatical differences between the L1 (English) and the L2 making particular emphasis on the use of subordinate clauses.

In the new online context, a use that has not been considered before is the use of online translators for independent language learning. Niño (2020, p. 22) investigated this use in an online setting supervising the use of online translators by advanced Spanish students during an independent language learning task, and concluded that "The use of online machine translation technology does not seem to be a hindrance for independent language learning; it seems to help with (mostly written) comprehension, vocabulary in context and as a quick grammar checker for small (written or oral) utterances". This happened in an advanced Spanish collaborative learning context where learners valued the opportunity to get to choose their input to feed the online translators, to contrast the linguistic quality of the output in various online translators, and evaluate their accuracy against their advanced proficiency in the target language. The pedagogical value of online translators in this study lies in their ability to foster autonomy through the exploration of

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paragraphs which need the aid of a human translator for quality assessment purposes. The combination of fast turnaround and wise translator's evaluation for a particular purpose can significantly accelerate performance.

various online references (notably online translators but also online dictionaries and concordancers) and through the students' use of language knowledge and analytical skills to evaluate the quality of the online translators' output in various registers and genres to produce a quality translation or piece of writing for a particular communicative purpose.

Another original use of MT was investigated recently by Bavendiek (2022) and refers to the use of MT as a parallel text to facilitate the understanding of literature texts for modern language learning. This activity exploits the inconsistencies and errors of MT as incentives to undertake close reading of a foreign language text. Through a focus on form students of German at beginner and intermediate levels developed their cultural understanding and grammatical accuracy using translanguaging whilst translating literary texts German into English utilizing *Google Translate*.

More recently, the use of MT as a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) tool to aid written production has also been investigated. For example, Tsai (2020) researched the effectiveness of using *Google Translate* as a translingual CALL tool for extemporaneous English writing within two cohorts of EFL students in a Taiwanese university. For this purpose, two types of online assessments were used to evaluate the students' writing performance. Results indicated that the translation approach by using *Google Translate* into English writing can help EFL students enhance their English writing performance by delivering more enriched content using more advanced vocabulary and making few spelling and grammatical errors.

Similarly, Lee (2020) did some research on the role of MT as a CALL tool by examining students' L2 writing outcomes with MT and recording their perceptions regarding its use. The results show that MT improved students' vocabulary, grammar, and expressions, which resulted in writing quality improvement.

From the literature, we learned that online translators have some undeniable pedagogical value, i.e. can help comprehension and serve as imperfect drafts for foreign language written production and translation, with proper guidance, can be used for independent learning and as a CALL tool that can help students enhance their L2 written production. In its very basic text-to-speech mode, some beginners have also acknowledged their use as pronunciation aids and with the speed at which speech-to-speech online translators and oral corpora are growing in no time, we will be exploring their use/value for foreign language oral comprehension and production. Bearing in mind that online translators can process various languages in ever-increasing language pair combinations, this can open up many communication channels where multilingual interaction is needed.

With so many uses in mind, online translators cannot be excluded from the list of online language reference tools used by language students at any level. Learning to make good pedagogical use of them in the language class is as important as learning how and when not to use them. This is especially relevant in online language assessments where, in principle, any language reference tool is allowed precisely because there is no way in which educators can monitor the use that students make of these tools during the online assessment.

Online translators, online assessments, and academic integrity

The use of online translators in online formative or summative assessments can be regarded as 'plagiarism' in that it constitutes unattributed, direct copying of language

(not ideas or thoughts) from a source other than the students' and in presenting this output as their own without proper acknowledgment. Other people label this use as "collusion" in that students work together in an unauthorized way to develop a submission for an online assessment when such input is not permitted. Finally, some people regard the use of online translators in online assessments as "cheating" in that students are receiving unauthorized assistance from online translators (not from another person) to complete an assignment or test.

Mundt and Groves' (2016) position in this debate is that as long as the content is not compromised, then the use of online translation software should be regarded as acceptable. In their own words:
"If what is important in the academic community is critical merit, originality of ideas, and a contribution to knowledge, then writing in one's language and translating the text using technology should be acceptable, given that the content does not suffer significantly in the translation process". (Mundt and Groves' 2016, p. 305)

They advocate for the judicious use of this technology and remind us that "MT is not set to replace language acquisition" but "It can be usefully utilized to facilitate the communication of valuable ideas and knowledge" (Mundt and Groves' 2016, p.396). In the new online learning setting where collaboration and spontaneous communication are key, "students who rely on the use of translation software instead of developing their language skills would be unable to contribute to collaborative and meaningful communication" (2016, p.397). They conclude that (if) "used carefully, and with imagination, the software can be used to aid the language learning process, not replace it" (Mundt and Groves' 2016, p.398).

As mentioned in the previous section, training students to use online translators is good practice and can prevent the so feared academic dishonesty. Correa (2014) proposes to **use these tools in the language class** to discourage/minimize academic dishonesty and to raise metalinguistic awareness. Faber and Turrero-García (2020) also think that using these tools **in a controlled setting** can help students avoid confusion and "accidental cheating" in subsequent formative or summative assessments.

Another important factor to combat academic misconduct is the creation of proper guidance for both educators and students on plagiarism detection, designing appropriate online assessments, encouraging proper reference of work submitted, and writing instructions on what it is and it is not considered licit before attempting an online assessment.

Are online translators contemplated in this guidance? Do institutions provide a statement clarifying whether the use of online translators is allowed for formative or summative online language assessment purposes? Are educators and students aware of how the online setting is shaping up new practices including the use of online translators for independent learning purposes and do we know what might be causing this and what consequences does it have for the future of online language teaching and assessment?

The following sections aim at providing an answer to these questions by commenting on the results of a survey conducted amongst various language educators from all over the world.

Research aims, method, and results

This section outlines the research aims, method of investigation, and results of this investigation.

Research aims

This pedagogical research reports on results from an online survey directed to mostly higher education and secondary education teachers. The main aims of this research are the following:

1. How do students and teachers use online translators in language class?
2. What are language teachers' opinions on the impact of online translators in online summative assessment types and the various levels of learning, on online plagiarism detection tools, and on the use of online translators in combination with other online language reference tools?
3. What can be done to improve online assessment practice, preserve academic integrity, and integrate online translators as valuable pedagogical tools in the language class?

Method

The method of investigation used to find an answer to the above research questions was an online survey carried out in June 2020 right after all the end-of-year online assessments and exam boards were over. Most of the participants (n=32) were teaching in Higher Education (90%), although some of them were also teaching in secondary schools and most of them have experience teaching various languages such as Spanish, French, English, German, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Korean and Danish, and at various levels of the CEF from A1 to C2 (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1
Language levels taught by respondents

What levels do you teach?

32 responses

Level	Responses
A1	15 (46.9%)
A2	14 (43.8%)
B1	18 (56.3%)
B2	21 (65.6%)
C1	16 (50%)
C2	5 (15.6%)
Other	3 (9.4%)
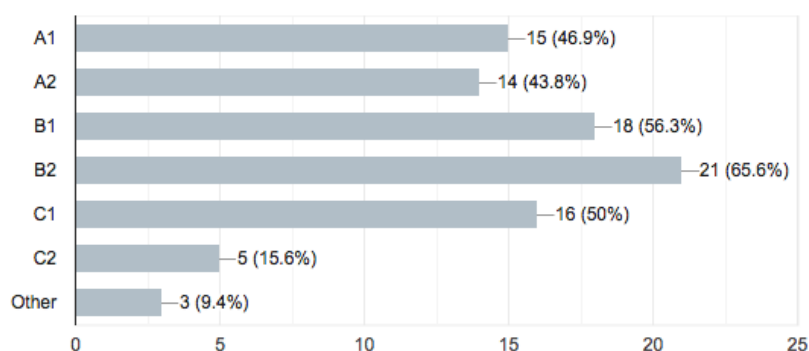
Results

The following sections contain the survey questions and results on the teachers' and students' use of online translators in the language class, online assessment types used, students' responses in online assessments perceived as genuine by teachers, the use of *Turnitin* to help spot plagiarism, the online reference tools used by students, and teachers' suggestions to maintain academic integrity.

Teachers' knowledge and use of online translators

When teachers were asked about their knowledge of online translators, only a third of them were familiar with Online Translation tools such as *Google Translate* or *Bing Translate*, and had explored their use in class (e.g. reverse translation, voice-to-text translation to check pronunciation, and Word translation), were familiar with their capabilities and explored them extensively. Only a couple of them also knew about machine translation and professional translation tools such as translation memories.

The results show that only 36.7% of the respondents/teachers had used online translators in their language classes. This suggests that perhaps this is due to the lack of pedagogical suggestions of how to inform the students adequately about the potential uses and pitfalls of online translators as language tools from the teaching and the learning perspective. Added on to this, some teachers may not be in favour of using them in class because they might have forbidden their use in formative and or summative online language assessments. Some others may not be comfortable with the use of translation as a means to learn a language or would not like to expose the students to imperfect "models" of learning.

To illustrate some of the uses of online translators suggested by those teachers who used them in class, please have a look at table 1 below where I provide some examples ranging from the use of post-editing techniques (e.g. spotting and correcting/improving online translators' output) to the use of online translators as dictionaries, or for the practice of translation techniques, without forgetting the training and demonstration of all the online translators' functionalities and settings in class to maximize output, or the contrastive translation evaluation of various online translators and getting the students to conclude the comparable translation quality of these for a particular communicative purpose taking into consideration linguistic and cultural parameters such as register, context, the regional variety, jargon, terminology, phraseology or the presence any sociocultural items to name a few.

Table 1
Some examples of how teachers used online translators in the language class

MT output as a bad model/MT post-editing: spotting and correcting/improving online translators' output
-I provide the online translation and ask students to correct/improve it. *-We work with Google translations of texts (Sp>Eng and Eng>Sp) to find out problems and pitfalls. We discussed the nature of the problems based on what*

students have been learning about the language and finally suggest improved translations.

Translation evaluation: comment on well translated utterances and examples of errors and their proper translation

-To let students evaluate the translation and to make them aware of how these tools can be used.

-I have used them to show students the quality and the limitations of their translations.

-When teaching a monolingual class, for translation exercises.

-Teaching them how to use the translators, making sure the context and examples highlighted are relevant to their learning needs, being aware of regional varieties, colloquial varieties, text type varieties, etc.

Training students on the functions and correct use of online translators

-To check words or expressions that I did not know or to show students how to use an online translator properly - including to choose a good online translator

-Focusing on how to use the applications and training the students to use them as tools.

- I teach them to use online translators as dictionaries

Students' use of online translators

The vast majority of teachers agreed that students use online translators on their phones or laptops/tablets as dictionaries to translate words or sentences to aid comprehension (rather than checking each word in an online dictionary or asking in class.) mostly from L2 to L1 but also from L1 to L2 e.g. to translate texts originally written in English as a response to a written task or even an oral task when they are preparing or to write complex sentences they had previously written in their mother tongue. Teachers noticed learners tend to use online translators with phrases, expressions, or whole paragraphs/texts. At lower levels, they noticed students using online translators to translate class or task instructions or to understand longer pieces of text. At all levels, teachers reported students using online translators to translate texts originally written in English as a response to a written or even an oral task when they are preparing or to check on how to express whole sentences in the language of study. Other reported uses were to write complex sentences students had previously written in their mother tongue or to obtain translation equivalents.

What type of online summative assessment was set up at your institution?

As shown in Table 2 below, most of the summative online assessments set up at the various institutions represented were online open-book written production assessments (n=19), video presentation assignments (n=17), simultaneous online oral assessments (n=14), or online assessments involving various skills such as reading, grammar, and writing (n=13), closely followed by portfolios (n=12), multiple-choice or short-answer exams (n=9) and online translation coursework (n=4).

Table 2
What type of online assessment was set up at your institution?

What type of online assessment was set up at your institution?	
An online open-book written production assessment	19 (58.4%)
Video presentation assignment	17 (53.1%)
Simultaneous online oral assessment	14 (43.8%)
Online assessment assessing various skills	13 (40.6%)
Independent learning portfolio	12 (37.5%)
Multiple choice/short answer examination	9 (28.1%)
Online translation coursework	4 (12.5%)

Most of the online assessments were submitted via *Turnitin* (43.8%) or were online summative tests integrated into the VLE (34.4%). To a lesser extent, some other tutors used email submission (25%), and a minority experimented with *Journals*, *Wikis*, *Zoom* oral tests, and *Canvas*.

The great majority of students (90%) submitted their responses to online assessments typed against a 10% minority teaching non-Latin-script languages that were in favour of handwritten and scanned submissions to get the students to practise writing systems such as kanji in Japanese or pinyin in Chinese. Regarding the time provided to do the online assessments, students were mostly given more time than usual (60%) or the same time (30%), with a small minority (10%) that were given less time.

In what language level and assessment type did students' answers seem more genuine

To the question *Did students' answers in online assessments seem genuine?* It is interesting to break down the responses provided by level and by assessment type.

Table 3 below shows the respondents' replies distributed by level (A1 to C2) with the left margin indicating the frequency of the students' responses ranging from "All of them" down to "None of them".

Table 3
At what language level did the students' responses seem more genuine?

At what language level did the students' responses seem more genuine?						
	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
All their responses	15.6%	18.8%	18.8%	25%	31.3%	40.6%
Most of their responses	28.1%	31.2%	50%	43.8%	37.5%	37.5%
Many of their responses	25%	25%	25%	21.9%	18.8%	12.5%
Some of their responses	21.9%	18.8%	6.3%	9.4%	9.4%	6.3%
A few of their responses	3.1%	-	-	-	-	-
None of their responses	6.3%	6.3%	-	-	3.1%	3.1%

Looking at the results in table 3, it is interesting how level B1 reported the majority of assessment students' responses perceived as genuine, followed by levels B2, C2, and C1. From this, we can conclude that from level B1 onwards, students' responses were perceived as more genuine by tutors. However, students' responses from levels A2 and A1 were perceived as less genuine or more in danger of compromising academic integrity.

Looking at the results per assessment type in table 4, we notice that reading and listening assessments, oral production assessments, and written production tests were the assessment types where students' responses seemed more genuine and less prone to academic malpractice. These were followed by independent portfolios and translation tests.

Table 4
In what assessment type did the students' responses seem more genuine?

In what assessment type did the students' responses seem more genuine?					
	Independent portfolio	**Oral production**	**Reading/ listening**	**Translation tests**	**Written production tests**
All their responses	28.1%	43.8%	31.2%	25%	21.4%
Most of their responses	50%	31.3%	34.4%	34.4%	34.4%
Many of their responses	15.6%	15.6%	34.4%	25%	25%
Some of their responses	3.1%	9.4%	-	9.4%	18.8%
A few of their responses	-	-	-	3.1%	-
None of their responses	3.1%	-	-	3.1%	-

Were the average marks per class/course higher, about the same or lower as compared to previous years?

Only 39% of respondents reported that the average marks per class/course were higher as compared to previous years, with the majority of tutors (61%) reporting very similar averages. The respondents mentioned the following factors as contributors to higher course averages: the extra time provided (58.6%), the use of online translators (51.7%), the assessment design (41.4%), the fact that some native speakers might have helped (37.9%), or that students might have copied and pasted text from the Internet (31%), or that students might have joined up to do the assessment together (13.8%), the

use of paraphrasing tools (13.8%) or a rather lenient moderation (13.8%). It is no surprise that a careful design of the assessment together with limited time to complete a summative online assessment are important factors to ensure limited access to online reference tools that can potentially help to demonstrate real levels of language attainment.

Did Turnitin help spot plagiarism in foreign language written production?

The vast majority of teachers (75%) agreed that *Turnitin* was not very helpful in spotting online foreign language as written production plagiarism. Some tutors had never used this tool, other tutors teaching Korean thought this language was not properly supported by *Turnitin* yet but many of them were aware that *Turnitin* can only produce similarity reports against other texts available in its database and, for this reason, it cannot effectively spot online foreign language written production plagiarism. To this effect, one respondent commented that whereas *Turnitin* can spot content plagiarism, it's not prepared to spot language plagiarism, which is more subtle and doesn't necessarily come from one published source. I do entirely agree with this statement but I do not think all language teachers were aware of the fact that *Turnitin* cannot spot output that has been fed through online translators. Formatting this output in such a way that it is recognizable to educators, would be a starting point.

Those who thought *Turnitin* helped them spot plagiarism in foreign language written production (25%) provided the following reasons: because it recognizes sources, it shows similarities with other online texts, it has a massive corpus, gave a clear percentage of plagiarism, and because it displays a similarity report.

Do you find it easy to spot students' plagiarised work?

A third of the participants (n=10) reported that it was easy to spot students' plagiarised work if you know the student's average performance in class, or when the style of writing differs significantly from that of the rest of the text because they can spot usage of advanced structures or register outside their remit. Finding inconsistencies in the student's level across different pieces of work can also help detect any plagiarised work.

Almost a third of the participants (n=8) thought that spotting plagiarism was not easy, especially in cases of collusion/commissioning, and with this term, they include both help of native speakers and the use of online translators. Others reported that "at higher levels is where it becomes more complicated to determine whether an utterance is the student's production or has been copied from other sources". The majority of the participants gave this question the benefit of the doubt and brought up various interesting issues to illustrate the complexity of plagiarism in foreign language written production. Some examples of these comments were the following: how (plagiarism) varies depending on the nature of the assessment, the number of utterances from which we can assume it is a case of plagiarism, the nature of these utterances e.g. translated but "own" pieces of text or just words that have been copied from other sources, and, ultimately, whether online translators should be unauthorized tools in online language assessments.

What features made you think the students' work could include online translators' output?

Table 5 summarises the features that made tutors suspect that students might have used online translators The main features mentioned were the following: 'literal translations' (53.1%), followed by incoherent text (50%), inconsistency (46.9%), mistakes that humans (even those with lower levels) do not make (25%), unnecessary repetition (12.5%) and incomplete sentences (9.4%). Interestingly, except for the last three features which seem more non-human, literal translations and incoherent and inconsistent utterances are rather frequent mistakes in students' foreign language written productions. Other features mentioned were: the choice of vocabulary, highly accurate language, and too complex structures or sentence patterns for the level the student is studying. This is debatable because a good choice of lexical items, depending on the task, can also indicate good use of lexical references. For this reason, it is good practice to encourage students to submit a list of references consulted when submitting their online work. Highly accurate language in an online assessment can also be the result of contract cheating which is a form of academic dishonesty in which students pay others to complete their coursework. Last but not least, the use of too complex structures or sentence patterns that have not been learnt yet in class can leave teachers wondering whether the student has produced that utterance. A recurrent example mentioned by Spanish teachers that can help to illustrate this is the use of the subjunctive tenses and constructions in a beginners' Spanish online test.

Table 5
What features made you think the students' work could include online translators' output?

What features made you think the students' work could include online translators' output?	
Literal translations	53.1%
Incoherent text	50%
Inconsistency	46.9%
Mistakes humans do not make	25%
Unnecessary repetition	12.5%
Incomplete sentences	9.4%

What do you think are the main reasons why students resort to the use of online translators in summative assessments?

The main reason reported was "because students want to obtain a higher mark" (78%), followed by the students' lack of language knowledge (59.4%), laziness (46.9%), lack of time (40.6%), checking purposes (37.5%) and lack of academic malpractice awareness (34.4%). In a smaller percentage, respondents also mentioned that some students worry that other students use online translators and obtain higher marks leaving them behind (3.1%), or that they feel they lack confidence in their language skills (3.1%).

The first two reasons mentioned above are no doubt the most worrying ones, if students resort to using an online translator's output because, somehow, they know that this output is more accurate or more advanced than what they can produce and because they know they can get easy access to this output fast and without raising any suspicion of academic misconduct. Surely, online summative assessments should be designed to

show achievement and progression in knowledge and skills against specific ILOs. Equally important is making students aware of the assessment process. This involves briefing them not only about any relevant instructions regarding time, submission, etc. but also providing clear guidelines on academic misconduct and the use of online translators well in advance to avoid any future misunderstandings.

Did you report any case of online translation plagiarism?

It was rather shocking to find out that 75% of the respondents did not report any case of online translation plagiarism. Amongst the reasons stated by the respondents were the following: because they could not prove it, because it requires time and they felt their institution has not often sided with instructors on these matters because they felt they were not directly responsible for the course, because they were unable to make a 100% watertight case, because it is very hard to prove, or because the percentage of the whole work was low.

Amongst those who reported it, these were the reasons behind: because in language teaching both the content and the language can be plagiarised and we need to ensure that academic integrity is upheld because they had noticed it and it was a crystal clear case e.g. a copy and paste review of a film in a dossier submission or detected a huge variation in the language used, from very unidiomatic and clunky to very fluent and idiomatic.

Not being able to prove that the students have made use of online translators is one of the main handicaps that prevent many tutors to report their use during online summative language assessments. Usually, when there is suspicion is mostly at lower levels when the text hypothetically produced by the student is too accurate in comparison with other texts produced by the same student. Higher-level students tend to be craftier in the way they make use of various online reference resources to produce their texts, and they also have more advanced knowledge of the language, which often can contribute to further increasing the accuracy of the online translators' output and, for this reason, it is even more complicated to judge what part of the text has been their production.

Do you consider output copied from an online translator a form of plagiarism?

Most of the participants (60%) consider output copied from an online translator a form of plagiarism. Some of the reasons provided were: (if the text is entirely copied from the online translator) "no language work was done in this case, no manipulation of the language because it is not the students' original work", "because the student is taking the easy way out and it does not guarantee that he/she is paying attention to language structure", "because it is outside help", "because it defeats the objective of showing how you write", "because it doesn't reflect the student's language skills without the help of a translator", similarly "because it's not the student's work; it is using and/or editing someone else's work", "because for a language module, where the quality of the student's language is assessed, if the student didn't produce it, surely the learning outcomes have been compromised", or because "it will not help students develop proficiency".

However, there were also 40% of respondents thought that copying the output from online translators does not constitute a form of plagiarism. Some of them think the use of online translators' output at their institutions is considered "collusion" o

"commissioning" i.e. using help from a tool/person, rather than using pre-existing material without proper referencing, but not plagiarism which would be "using someone else's text without attributing authorship".

What is clear is that there does not seem to be a consensus on this and every HE institution seems to have produced their disclaimers which range from discouraging the use of online translators or dictionaries during summative online language assessments to avoiding mentioning these online reference tools in the exam instructions on the basis that if we cannot prove the students might have used them, we cannot ban their use.

What forms of online language reference do you think students used in their summative assessment?

Table 6summarises responses to the question 'What forms of online language reference do you think students used in their summative assessment? The majority of responses concentrated on the use of online translators (n=28) and online bilingual dictionaries (n=21), closely followed by search engines (n=16) which usually involve a rather more comprehensive usage by students who use them as large-scale concordancers and investigate content, cultural, and language-related issues.

The use of online translators and dictionaries was investigated by O'Neill (2019) and Bower (2010). The latter (2010:13) reported that "students found out online machine translation easier to use than a bilingual dictionary probably because (online machine translation) provides a nearly instant translation of text and does not require scanning through and interpreting information on word usage and multiple meanings as does a dictionary entry". Students have reported this in class and there are currently various websites/apps such as *SpanishDict or DeepL* that combine online translator functions with online dictionary functions.

Table 6
What forms of online language reference do you think students used in their summative assessment?

What forms of online language reference do you think students used in their summative assessment?	
Online translators	28 (87.5%)
Online bilingual dictionaries	21 (65.5%)
Search engines	16 (50%)
Verb conjugators	15 (46.9%)
Online bilingual concordancers	13 (40.6%)
Paraphrasing tools	5 (15.3%)
Essay banks	1 (3%)
Spellchecker in Word	1 (3%)

The use of verb conjugators comes fourth (n=15). Students very often use online translators as verb conjugators because these are rather reliable in inflected Romance languages such as Spanish or French.

Not surprisingly, the use of online bilingual concordancers came fifth (n=13). I believe this is because many students do not know about their existence and, very often, language students have not been trained in their use for language learning purposes. In this respect, language tutors also would need proper training with specific pedagogical

examples to find out about the capabilities of these tools and to be provided with some ideas of how to integrate them in the language class so that students learn to use them confidently in their independent language learning.

The last three tools (paraphrasing tools with n=5, essay mills with n=1, and spellcheckers with n=1) were reported by language tutors to be less frequently used by students. These days we all assume that students use grammar and spellcheckers when typing their work in a word processor, however, these tools are not available in the assessment tools of many virtual learning environments and the gap here is rather evident, since students reported to have struggled to take the time to properly used diacritics and written accents during timed online assessments. Certainly, there is an interesting field of research here, i.e. contrasting the language students' use of grammar, vocabulary, and spelling with and without the aid of spell and grammar checkers and other external online resources to find out the impact these tools are having on language development.

Finally, the use of essay banks and paraphrasing tools also scored very low in the frequency list, presumably because these are less used by students or more difficult to be identified as sources of plagiarism by language tutors. Another interesting field of research would be the use of paraphrasing tools for language learning purposes. These tools work as reworders and rewriters and claim to help avoid plagiarism but their use to disguise sources of text can be questionable and, as it happens with online translators, evidencing their use by students can be rather difficult.

Did you have some kind of invigilation system in place?

At the time the survey was conducted, the vast majority of tutors (78%) reported not having any kind of online invigilation in place for their online summative assessments. Proctoring systems, with video and audio monitoring, can be costly and sometimes difficult to justify within the higher education academic integrity framework. Many faculty students and administrators have critiqued proctoring tools and have expressed significant concerns about their use to monitor students' behaviour. Also, the effectiveness of these technologies has proved to be inconsistent, and very little literature is available to indicate how many secondary and higher education institutions make use of these technologies.

Does your institution display a statement in summative assessments reminding students to act with integrity? Are online translators included in this statement?

The vast majority of respondents (84.4%) indicated that their institutions do have a statement reminding students to act with integrity in summative assessments. However, only 43.8% of them had online translators included in this statement.

I believe academic integrity policies often need to be customized for modern foreign language courses where online translators are part of the widely available online tools. Ideally, students should not resort to any language reference tool whilst attempting their online summative assessments, unless specifically told otherwise. This is to be able to evaluate the students' actual language skills as part of the course learning outcomes at the time of the assessment.

Regarding online formative assessments, these should be used constructively to encourage good academic practice, and these constitute an excellent opportunity for the

teacher to engage with the learner around various uses of online translators which can be carefully integrated into the learning curriculum in such a way that it is meaningful, authentic, it has a communicative focus, with emphasis on collaboration, problem-solving and critical thinking.

Having said this, the jury is out on this issue since one can argue that by making use of various language referencing online tools in online assessments, students are integrating checking mechanisms in the process of producing foreign-language output. If the tools can provide the student with reliable translation equivalents/monolingual utterances, this can also help students build up more complex phrases and a higher level of sophistication. As pointed out before, it is often very challenging for language tutors to evidence the source of the students' productions but if they have managed to expand their phrases and paragraphs into more elaborate discourse making use of structures learned and within the scope of the communicative context provided, then this should be a good indicator of language progression and improvement. Needless to say, I am excluding cases of collusion or essay mills here. The key would be in the fruitful interaction of the student with the various widely available online language referencing tools in a web-based technology-enhanced language learning scenario which can help enrich their linguistic output.

What can be improved in your institution to prevent foreign language online plagiarism and maintain academic integrity?

The answers to this question serve as a nice conclusion to the debate of using online translators in the class and to the dilemma of whether to ban them or allow them in online summative assessments.

One respondent highlighted the need to "come to terms with the fact that online translators are a fact of life and (we should) design some assessments that make their use impractical".

Quite a few responses emphasized the need to train students to use them effectively. For example:

"I am still not convinced that online translators are the enemy, I think that with training they can support learning. Therefore, I am not in favour of punitive responses, only constructive ones".

There were some comments on the need to increase awareness amongst students about what is considered academic malpractice and to outline clear consequences of this.

Many insisted on the need to include online translators in universities' assessment policies. The following comment illustrates this:

"From next year onwards, we will give clearer guidelines regarding the use of online tools and include them in the marking scheme. Students will also be asked to list the tools they have used at the end of every summative work. They will be encouraged (and taught) to select and use online tools efficiently and this will be part of the assessment, where appropriate".

Re-designing assessments fit for the online setting and bulletproof against online machine translation tools were also suggested:

"For language production, teaching students to use these tools, think of circumstances where they might need to produce language, and generate assessments that are challenging even with the use of these tools. In oral interactions, have a face-to-face element. In written assignments, let them use the tools, why not?"

Quite a few respondents were in favour of being open about the use of online translation tools and encouraged its integration in the class. The following comment serves to illustrate this:

"I am still not convinced that online translators are the enemy; I think that with training they can support learning. Therefore, I am not in favour of punitive responses, only constructive ones".

Getting into this open and inclusive frame of mind is as important as obtaining an informed opinion about online translators, and their main pedagogical uses and limitations. Both students and teachers need to become aware of their main functions, applications available, and how these vary in quality depending on variables such as language pair, language direction, genre, or register. It is also advisable that educators are aware of how pedagogic translation and translanguaging can be used constructively in language class. Previous informed knowledge on MT will also help educators design more appropriate, authentic, and realistic formative and summative online assessments and consistent academic dishonesty policies so that the barrier that determines when their use if licit or not is delimitated.

In a smaller proportion, respondents who might not be so pro online translators outlined some measures to prevent students using them such as proctoring, imposing more severe punishments for plagiarism, reminding students that they are not allowed to use online translators in online assessments, adjusting the assessment tasks to online realities, promoting synchronous online assessment over its asynchronous counterpart, implementing video or audio-based testing, or developing an approach for controlled conditions in written assessments.

Reflections and recommendations

The use of online machine translation tools and their integration in the language class (with special emphasis on new online scenarios) is an area with a lot of scope for pedagogical research and this could be done with three different goals in mind.

Firstly, there is a need to train language educators in the various forms of online machine translation tools, their features, the kind of output it produces, their strengths and limitations, and how their use can be integrated into the language class. It is essential that language tutors of the various languages to and from which online translators translate nowadays have a first-hand experience experimenting with them, can contrast online translators' output with students' production, and, in the process, learn to recognize this

form of generated language with a view not to condemn students' use of it (this is unethical and very complicated to evidence) but to inform their teaching and assessment practice. This often involves teaching students how they can benefit from using these tools and how and under which conditions they are not supposed to use them.

Secondly, more studies would be welcomed on the impact that the use of these tools is having on language students' acquisition and multilingual competencies. These investigations can involve students at various levels, in different language combinations and/or about the many dimensions of language learning, for instance, lexical usage, grammatical accuracy, orthographical accuracy, digital literacy, effective discursive features usage, intercultural competence, communication in specific language learning contexts, registers, genres or domains, etc.

Another exciting area of potential research is the use of MT CALL and how online translators can be used in combination with various online Web 2.0 applications and with online corpus-based tools to enhance language learning through meaningful interaction around authentic carefully designed tasks for each learning level that can make students challenge their previously acquired language knowledge and skills to evaluate the online translators' output as they contrast it with reliable and authentic models that can serve as feedback and help them produce more complex and sophisticated utterances when rendering a translation for a particular context. In this respect, there is scope for online machine translation technology to be turned into inclusive automated evaluation systems which can cater to different learning styles and add a more robust and rounded dimension to any online language course.

Conclusion

This pedagogical investigation has explored the potential use of online translators by language students with particular emphasis on summative assessments in the newly adopted online learning context. We have learned that students do use online translators in class and that it is in the lower levels where unauthorized use of online translators in summative assessments is more likely to take place. In terms of assessment methods, we learned that reading, listening, oral, and written production tests are less prone to plagiarism followed by independent learning portfolios and translation tests.

Even more interesting were the reflections learned from language educators on various fronts:

Firstly, tools such as *Turnitin* alone cannot be used to detect online language learning plagiarism in online summative assessments. Tutors realized the importance of debunking myths like these and, instead, exploring alternative forms of inclusive assessment designs to obtain a more trustworthy performance from the students against the learning objectives. Equally important is the need to provide clear guidelines that contemplate how online translators should be used/not used, under which circumstances, and how their illicit use (especially in summative assessments) will also be contemplated in marking schemes and University policies to preserve academic integrity.

Secondly, we learned that it is not all "black or white" when it comes to labelling (or not) online machine translation tools as a source of plagiarism. Whereas many of the respondents agreed that it constitutes an illicit form of language in that the students did not put in the intellectual effort to produce it, others argue that in the process of generating

the automatic translation, content is not compromised, and students can be taught how to use these tools effectively to enhance their language learning experience in combination with other online tools such as dictionaries or concordancers.

The future of language learning is becoming increasingly digitalized with new ways of presenting information and interacting, especially in the new online setting, with its new forms of practicing and assessing language in its oral and written format, new ways of providing feedback, and working collaboratively in spontaneous and authentic ways. In this context online machine translation tools have an important part to play in the academic community and beyond facilitating communication, providing individualized feedback, and aiding lifelong learning to name some examples. Outside the academic context, the efficient use of these tools can constitute a valuable asset for future employers who are not only interested in the accurate use of the target language, but also in contracting individuals with the capacity to analyze content in various languages to extract or summarise specific information concerning a particular language reality. This is particularly needed in minority languages with limited (and mostly monolingual) online resources.

Outside the academic world, the new economic and political realities have served to emphasize how many challenges we are currently facing are multilingual in nature. The proliferation of online translator tools and neural models online can help break down language barriers and promote the sharing of knowledge and information worldwide. Language learning will not be disadvantaged but essential to operate and train these constantly evolving forms of technology.

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