

TRANSLATION BUSINESS AND TRANSLATORS

Translation Industry Survey 2010/2011 – WHAT'S NEW SINCE 2008?

This survey is a follow-up to the first edition we launched at the end of 2008. We aim to renew it every 2 years.

The results and the analysis of the first survey (which focused mainly on the issue of the relationship between translation agencies and freelance translators, and on a general overview of the situation of freelance translators) are available for consultation. Please click on the following two links in order to read the results of the first survey (in French): [Translation industry survey](#) - [Translation Industry Survey - Synthesis](#)

Our objective was to let people know about the translation industry and participate in increasing its visibility. The 2010 Edition focuses on some new elements which seemed key to us in the current market:

- The evolution of **technology** as a whole (translator tools and the Internet more generally) and the consequences it has for the industry and its players.
- The **appearance of new ways of working** (crowd sourcing, etc.), which are a direct consequence of the evolution of technology.

THANKS TO ALL THE RESPONDENTS.

The Trad Online team.

Contact: contact@tradonline.fr

A survey conducted by Trad Online, a translation agency based in France (Boulogne - Paris) – www.tradonline.fr

C O N T E N T S

OVERVIEW	3
WHO TOOK PART?	3
FOCUS ON THE TECHNOLOGY	4
SOCIAL NETWORKS	6
CROWD TRANSLATION	9
ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WITH TRANSLATION AGENCIES	9
THE FUTURE	11

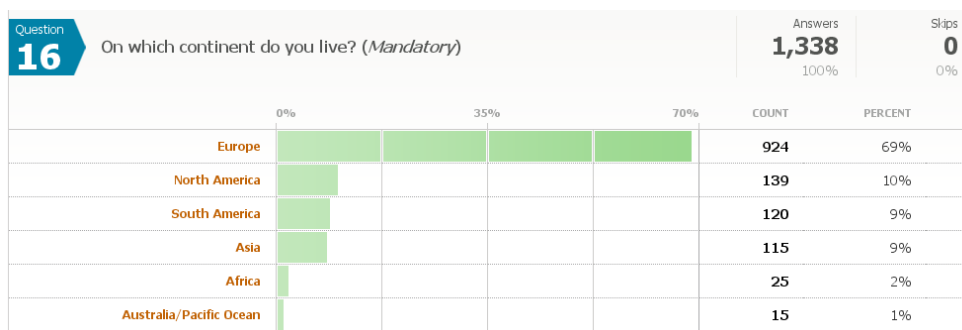
OVERVIEW

This survey took place between November 16th, 2010 and February 3rd, 2011. It intended to collect feedback from at least 1000 professional linguists (translators & interpreters mainly) on various aspects of their work: technology, selling their services, etc.

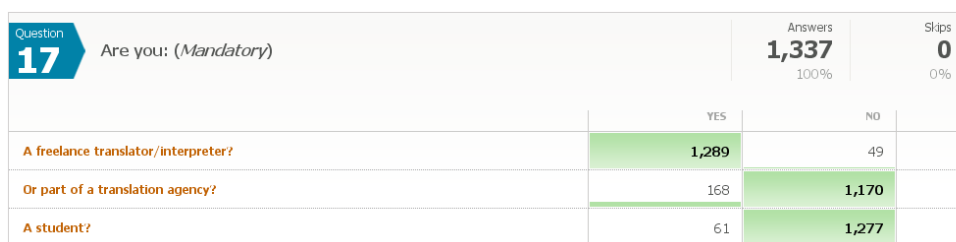
The questionnaire was online and consisted of 20 questions. Respondents were invited to participate thru a variety of specialized translator portals and communities.

WHO TOOK PART?

1330 respondents (full answers) took part in the survey.



Originating from 93 different countries: 69% in Europe, 10% in North America, 9% in South America, 9% in Asia and 2% in Africa.



96.5% are freelance translators/interpreters, 12% state that they work for translation agencies, 4% are students.

FOCUS ON THE TECHNOLOGY

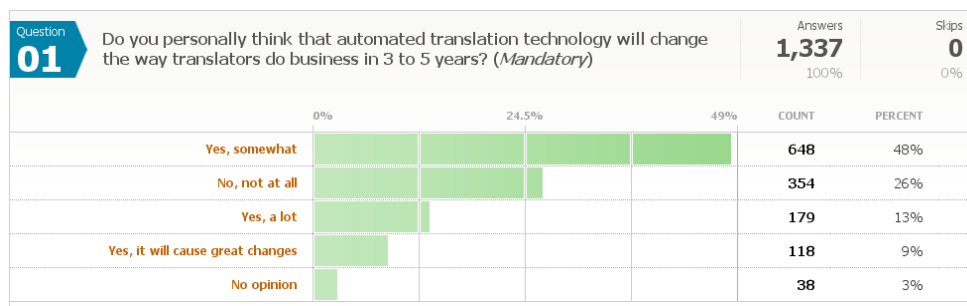
To the question whether technology will have an impact in the near future on the way translators do business:

Automated translation

26% of the participants do not think that any change at all will occur in the next 3 to 5 years for their business due to the rise of automated translation technology.

22% of the participants feel that significant changes are coming along.

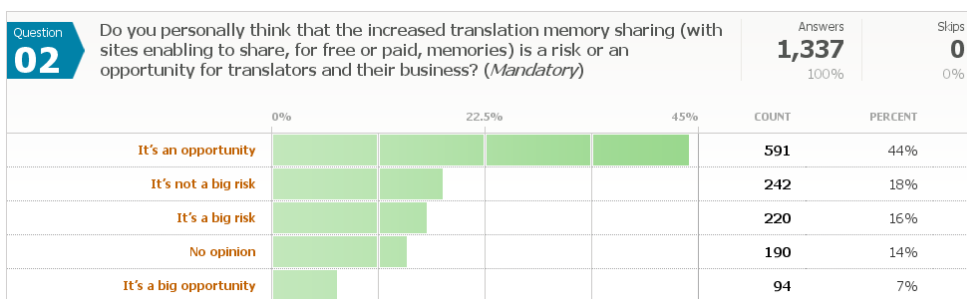
48% of the participants think that there will be some changes, but not very significant ones.



The sharing of translation memories

14% do not have an opinion on this new technology.

51% of the participants see the sharing of translation memories as an opportunity (including 7% as a big opportunity) and 34% as a risk (half of these respondents see this as a big risk).



COMMENTS

Automated translation and the sharing of translation memories (and glossaries) are the two most important new technologies and processes to have appeared in the translation industry during the last 15 years.

The fact that one fourth of the participants do not see any change at all coming in the near future, despite the hundreds of millions of US\$ committed to numerous R&D efforts to develop professional automated translation systems, is surprising.

This could be explained by several factors:

- There have been announcements of successful automated translation for decades, without exceptional results up to now (but in our opinion, the coming of age of good quality automated translation could be just around the corner),

- Denial? It may be (and this tendency is also sometimes shared by the authors of this survey) that we reject the advent of these technologies and “deny” the possibility of their success, because they jeopardize our business,

- Realism: current automated translation projects, including Google Translate, can very easily be tricked into giving ridiculous translations and don't really appear to present any serious threats to translators.

It is also interesting to see that the participants are very cautious. In the numerous free text comments, the drawbacks expressed by respondents concerning the use of translation memories (TM) can be described as follow: quality control, intellectual property, standardization (impoverishment of the language) & value chain.

Respondents are certainly right to raise these issues with TM sharing, but successful projects are already taking place.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Another significant trend over the last few years: social and professional networks (linkedin, viadeo, facebook, etc.)

61% of the participants see these services as an opportunity for their professional activity and 34% state that they don't know if it as an opportunity or a threat. Among our respondents, 67% use these sites to meet colleagues and find information concerning their activity, 50% use it as a way to find customers, and 30% to find partners.

Question	Answers	Skips			
03 Do you see community sites (such as linkedin.com, Viadeo.com, Facebook.com, etc.) as an opportunity / strength or as a danger / risk for your translation activity ? (Mandatory)	1,337 100%	0 0%			
	0%	30.5%	61%	COUNT	PERCENT
An opportunity for my activity				813	61%
I don't know				474	35%
A risk for my activity				50	4%

Question	Answers	Skips	
04 Have you already taken advantage of the capacities of community websites and social networks to find: (Mandatory)	1,336 100%	1 <1%	
	YES	NO	
Clients (agencies or direct customers)?			
Partners?			
Colleagues with whom to exchange?			
Information of interest for your job as a translator?			
Providers?			

COMMENTS:

The fact that one third of our respondents declare that they don't know if these community websites represent a risk or an opportunity is also a surprise to us.

These networking websites are considered by respondents to be more important to exchange points of view than to find customers or translation projects.

Some quotes from the respondents' free text comments include: "no serious customers come from using these sites", "they may be useful for beginners but not for me", "I don't see how they can be useful for my business", "too much time to invest before something interesting comes up", etc.

Whereas it can be understood easily that Facebook isn't the best place online for professional translators to find customers (the site isn't business oriented), LinkedIn (and Xing / Viadeo in Europe) together represent close to 150 million business profiles. They could be "a way".

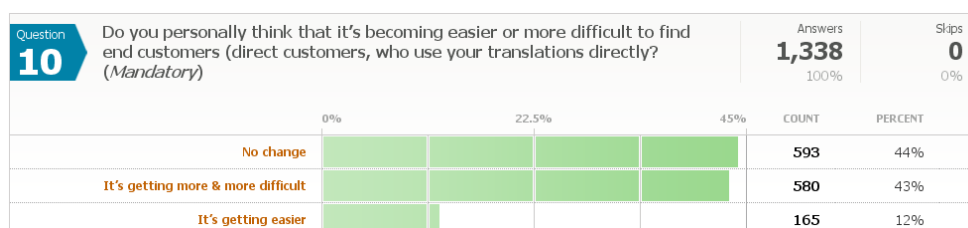
The question we would like to raise here is whether these tools are:

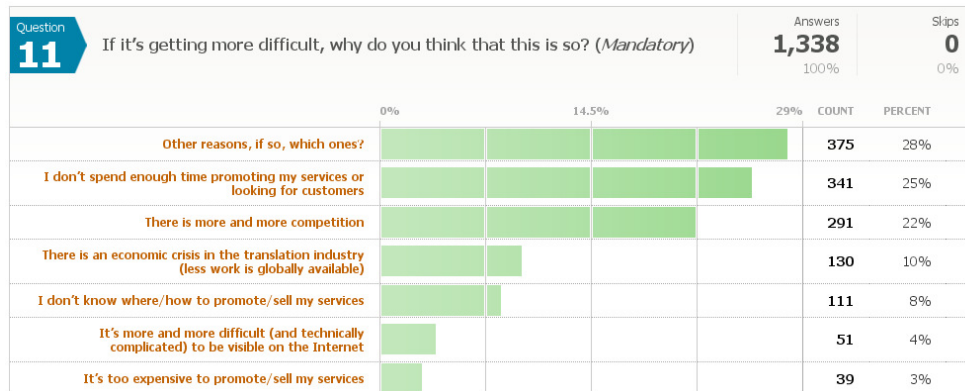
- Saturated with too many translation professionals looking for customers?
- Too difficult to use, or too time-consuming, for translators to successfully promote their services on?
- Present other drawbacks for the linguistic services industry's specific sales process?

Another argument that could be given against this result:

12% of the translators state that it is becoming easier these days to find end-customers (end-customers being the actual users of translated content, as opposed to intermediaries such as communication or translation companies) and 43% state that it is increasingly difficult (44% don't see any change over the last few years).

The main reasons are: for one third of respondents the "lack of time", for another third "more and more competitors" (only 4% say that it is "technically difficult to master the online tools" and 3% "too expensive to promote my services").





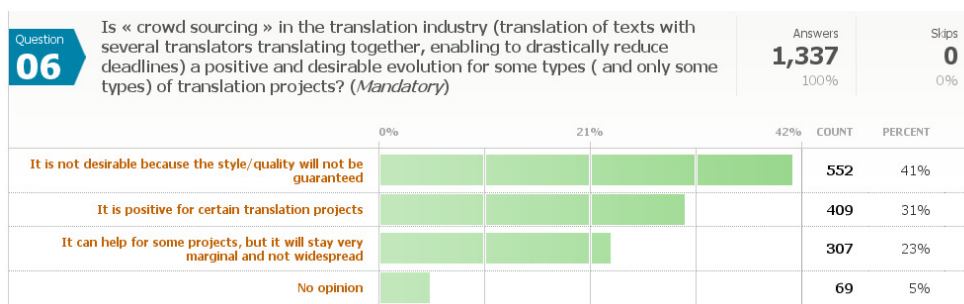
COMMENTS:

The trend among respondents seems to be increasing difficulty in selling and promoting their services. Considering that 1/3 of respondents give lack of time to take care of sales as the main problem for finding new customers, services and sites which aim at promoting translators' services should find success in the coming years.

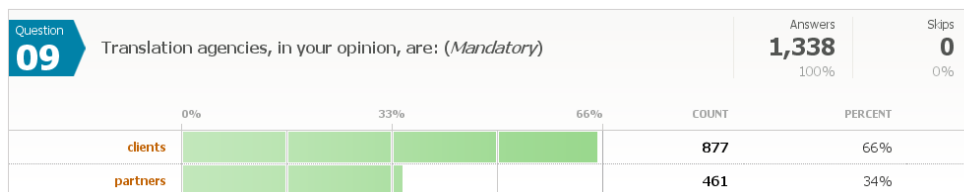
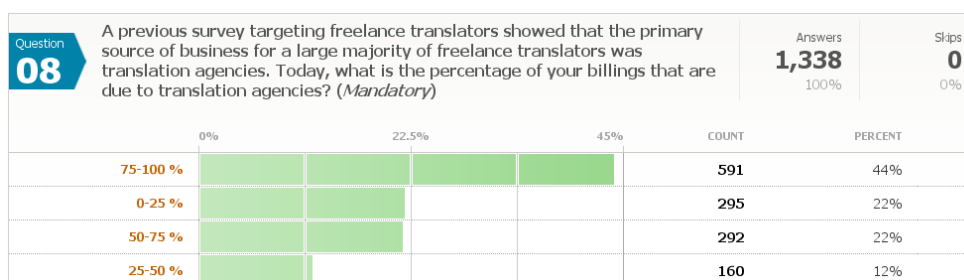
As more and more tools (social networks, IP phone, communities, mailing, etc.) are now accessible and affordable to almost everyone in this business, this could lead to interesting debates.

CROWD TRANSLATION

Not a significant trend up to now but a new practice that has been used in many contexts: crowd translation is seen as “useful in certain contexts” by 54% of the participants and a translation process that should be considered for specific projects. Unsurprisingly, quality control during this “use of the crowd” is the participants’ main concern.



ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP WITH TRANSLATION AGENCIES



COMMENTS:

This result confirms one of the results of the previous survey ([Translation industry survey](#) - [Translation Industry Survey - Synthesis](#)) conducted by Trad'Online and KD'zID at the end of 2008. For 66% of translators who responded, 50% to 100% of their billings come from translation agencies. And as translation agencies are the primary customers of a great majority of translators, they focus their effort primarily towards vertical, specialized online platforms such as Proz.com.

This result could be compared to the next one: 66% of the participants consider translation agencies as clients and only 34% as partners (we could have added the term "provider"). In the numerous pieces of free text feedback from respondents, the usual comments are given, varying from "I have a very good relationship with the agencies" to "never believe an agency, they are only there to ask to reduce your prices and make a profit", as well as "in the end, we are both working for the same final client" and "Small agencies rather tend to be "partners" as they better understand the complexity of freelancers' work and consider freelancers as partners too; big agencies tend to be "clients" as they require more from freelancers who they consider as "suppliers".

The full range of translators' appreciation towards agencies was therefore expressed once more in this survey, going from strong hostility towards agencies to a firm belief in the validity of the freelance translator<>translation agency "team" (and also a lot of neutral sentiments).

[\[next page\]](#)

COMMENTS:

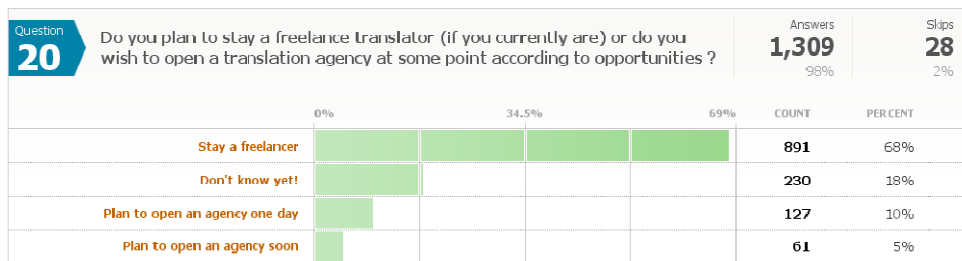
The authors of the survey will not attempt to solve this ongoing and recurrent “debate” about the love/hate relationship between freelance translators and translation agencies, as in our opinion there is no clear cut answer.

Translation agencies (most of them) have great added value in some projects and for some customers (for example when a lot of project management needs to be done, to do sales, to manage the quality process of having translation proofread, etc) and for some other projects/customers don't have that much added value and can tend to become just an unnecessary intermediary (for example for some unilingual translation projects).

When probed, it also appears that negative feedback from translators towards translation agencies often originates from bad experiences with some translation agencies, who don't respect translators, or pay late, or don't pay at all, etc.

THE FUTURE

Finally, from a prospective point of view about what professional status to keep in the future: 68% of the participants wish to stay freelancers, 18% don't know and 15% are thinking of creating a translation agency sooner or later, with one or several translators or alone.



1 in 6 respondents therefore have the potential to become entrepreneurs in the coming years. It seems an encouraging sign that a minority, a small but not insignificant fraction, of translators believe in the future of their industry and want to take a more active part in it.