

Poster: Usefulness of Translation Technology Training from Mexican Universities

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Abstract

In a study done in 2018 it was reported that few professors teach technology in few translation courses in Mexico. Some reasons for this were that instructors had not been well trained in their academic programs when they were students, or they lacked a more comprehensive knowledge of these technologies (Peña-Aguilar, 2018). Effective training was not possible for most of these instructors as students and they seem to be reproducing similar learning insufficiencies with future translators. Because of this, another survey-based project was devised to identify the use that professionals who graduated from Mexican translation programs are making of translation technologies. How has their educational background affected their disposition towards the use of translation technologies? Some results indicate that professional translators do not resort to the use of “core” translation technologies very often, but do use other electronic resources useful for accomplishing their tasks. Professional translators think they could have learned about TEnTS at university (and they wished they had), but university instructors are still not teaching these technologies as much. So there is a need reported by a few professionals, but not being met by some university programs.

1 Introduction

Universities have to meet the demand of society (Erwen & Wenming, 2013), but they may also lose sight of their main objectives, especially when there is no contact with real world needs, and there is a lack of research studies that clarify the connection between changes in the field of translation and the necessary education changes required to meet them. This survey-based study is a response to this need to delve into reality a little more.

The entire project includes two related studies. My motivation was, firstly, to explore the situation in Mexico regarding the use of translation technologies in universities. Thus, this first project was focused on the instruction of translation technology at university level and was directed to teachers from translation programs. Instructors reported that few of them were teaching technology in translation courses, and some of the reasons given for the lack of use of translation technologies were that these educators had not been well trained in their academic programs when they were students, or did not have a comprehensive knowledge of these technologies (Peña-Aguilar, 2018).

The second study was conceived to link with the first, and mainly I wanted to identify how training (or lack of it) was affecting professional translators in their work, and to determine the extent of use of translation technologies by professionals who graduated from Mexican translation programs. The question I want to answer is: Is there any sign of alignment of professionals' translation education with their real-life experience?

2 Literature Review

The inspiration to direct attention to these themes came from the fact that there is a certain absence of literature on this matter in Mexico. After reviewing bibliographic databases and asking national colleagues about publications in this regard I only confirmed the scarcity of research work dealing with these issues. In spite of the challenges, I was able to identify two research studies

done in Mexico about the state of the field in this country. They are nationwide studies that focus on general aspects of the translation territory and they add relevant data regarding translation technologies, which will be used for contrasting with the work that will be presented.

The first study was carried out in 2014. This research entitled *Encuesta nacional del perfil del traductor profesional en México* (National survey on the profile of professional translators in Mexico) was done by Luis Raúl Fernández Acosta; the main objective of his work was to learn about the profile of professional translators in Mexico in terms of academic background and professional performance. He was able to survey 477 translators working throughout the 32 states of the country and asked questions in regard to employment status, areas of specialization, and computer-aided translation tools (use and preference) (Fernández Acosta, 2018). This seems to be the first assessment of the situation of translators' reality in Mexico and the sample of participants was big enough to identify interesting trends in their answers.

The second study, was a widespread endeavour done by the Italia Morayta Foundation in 2017 titled *Estudio de encuesta sobre la traducción y la interpretación en México 2017* (2017 Survey study about translation and interpretation in Mexico). For this work they gathered answers from 1087 translators and interpreters from all across Mexico. So, compared to the research done in 2014, this study more than doubled the sample size. Due to this, the work done by this foundation is considered the most comprehensive research done on the field in my home country, Mexico. Similarly, it sought to gain knowledge about the nature of the work of the Mexican translator and their education background, if any. This study included, not only translators and interpreters of foreign languages, but also those who work with sign and indigenous languages as well. This was very much appreciated by researchers, professionals and educators alike, as there had never been a record of this type (Vaughn Holcomb, 2017). In general, the two research studies' outcomes generally coincide, however, what remains to be determined is how similar or close in percentages are the findings from the study being presented in the following pages.

We have to consider that translation technology and the impact (or lack of it) it has had on translators have been assessed differently in various contexts, but it seems that in Mexico we are still exploring how much it is being used or accepted in the field, like the present study.

3 Methodology

The emphasis of the instrument used to gather data is on the use of technology as reported by translators, and on background information that will provide variables for additional analysis of the results (the instrument can be consulted in the appendix section). It is important to note that the term translation technologies is used here to encompass two acronyms in the field: CAT (computer-aided translation) and TEnT (translation environment tool). The latter is part of the former, but for this study TEnT was used as a reference point, and other tools that may be considered a CAT tool, like the concordancer *Linguee*, are mentioned separately. An example of the type of tool is given so as to clarify all the tools to participants.

The survey was shared in online developer Survey Monkey, and participation was anonymous and requested through various channels: Facebook groups, electronic mails to program coordinators, and publications in proZ.com discussion forums. The sampling methods employed were convenience and snowball as most potential participants were located in Mexico.

4 Results and discussion

For this section, and due to space constraints, we will present the answers to some questions and in a general manner. But when a variable can provide an interesting understanding of the topic at hand or other related-studies can add to the discussion, the results will be shown differently or analyzed from the different perspectives. For that matter, the research done by Luis Raúl

Fernández Acosta (2018) and the study conducted by Morayta Foundation (Vaughn Holcomb, 2017) will be used to compare outcomes when possible. Subsequently, and taking into consideration the first study on teaching translation technologies (Peña-Aguilar, 2018) mentioned before, some cross-referenced ideas will be shared as well.

A total of 25 former students of Mexican translation programs participated in this survey. The size of the sample is not large enough to be able to generalize the results, but it may give an insight into the situation of professional translators in regards to the use of translation technologies in Mexico. In general (see Figure 1, bottom circle), more than half of the participants indicated they had a bachelor’s degree in translation (60%), over half of them had also completed their studies recently within the previous 3 years (Figure 1, left circle).

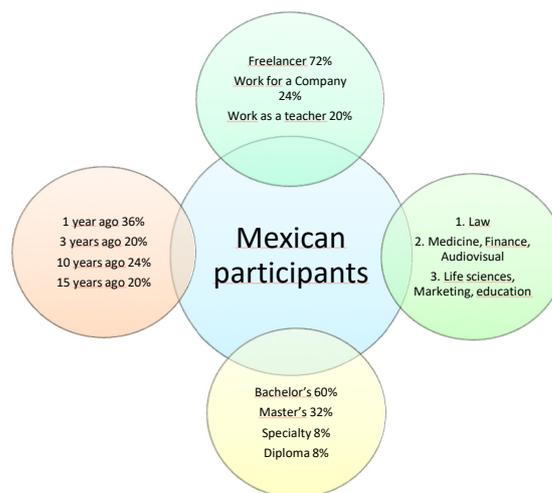


Figure 1: Academic and background information of participants

In terms of nature of their employment (Figure 1, top circle), they are mostly freelancers, and the field they focus mostly on is legal, and medical (along with Finance and audio-visual) comes in second place (Figure 1, right circle). Similarly, in Fernández (2018) and Vaughn (2017) studies Legal was also the most selected field, with Medicine following in second place.

In relation to the types of technologies and frequency of use, (see Table 1 below) search engines, like Google, are very much used. Likewise online dictionaries and bilingual concordancers, tools that are generally popular among language professionals. But the frequency drops when it comes to term banks, TEnTs, and machine translation systems, which are considered “core” translation technology or frequently-employed technology in other contexts. When comparing our 36% of frequent users (“all the time” and “regularly” options) of TEnTs with Fernández (2018) and Vaughn (2017) studies, the responses are similar. Fernández’ investigation reported that 41% of Mexican translators used CAT tools whereas Vaughn informed that 37% of surveyed translators did so regularly. Notwithstanding the difference in the size of samples, answers in all these studies are still in agreement.

	ALL THE TIME (1)	REGULARLY (2)	SOMETIMES (3)	NEVER (4)	TOTAL
Search engines (e.g. Google, ask.com)	56.00% 14	24.00% 6	20.00% 5	0.00% 0	25
On-line dictionaries (monolingual-bilingual, e.g. Wordreference or Cambridge)	68.00% 17	32.00% 8	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	25
Bilingual concordancers (e.g. Linguee or TradooIT)	48.00% 12	28.00% 7	20.00% 5	4.00% 1	25
Term banks (e.g. IATE or TERMIUM Plus)	12.00% 3	28.00% 7	32.00% 8	28.00% 7	25
Translation environment tools (e.g. LogiTerm or SDL Trados)	24.00% 6	12.00% 3	40.00% 10	24.00% 6	25
Machine translation systems (Google Translate or DeepL)	8.00% 2	16.00% 4	48.00% 12	28.00% 7	25

Table 1: Frequency of use of translation technologies

Finally, when contrasting educators' answers (from the first study by Peña-Aguilar, 2018) with the present work, translation professionals reported using TEnTs more (36%) than the frequency in which instructors teach them in class. In the previous investigation, 20% of Instructors said they taught TEnTs "all of the time" and "regularly" in translation courses, 44% sometimes and 46% never. According to these samples, there is a mismatch with the frequency with which this technology is taught and used in real life by professionals.

	ALL THE TIME (1)	REGULARLY (2)	SOMETIMES (3)	NEVER (4)	TOTAL
Search engines (e.g. Google, Ask.com)	4.17% 1	4.17% 1	20.83% 5	70.83% 17	24
On-line dictionaries (monolingual-bilingual, e.g. Wordreference or Cambridge)	0.00% 0	12.50% 3	20.83% 5	66.67% 16	24
Bilingual concordancers (e.g. Linguee or TradooIT)	0.00% 0	4.17% 1	25.00% 6	70.83% 17	24
Term banks (e.g. IATE or TERMIUM Plus)	0.00% 0	8.33% 2	25.00% 6	66.67% 16	24
Translation environment tools (e.g. LogiTerm or SDL Trados)	8.00% 2	16.00% 4	28.00% 7	48.00% 12	25
Machine translation systems (e.g. Google Translate or DeepL)	0.00% 0	8.33% 2	25.00% 6	66.67% 16	24

Table 2: Frequency of clients' requests to use technology

Concerning the requests on the part of clients to use certain technologies for translation assignments, our findings show that there are no frequent petitions of this type for them. Still, there are indications that clients are making requests for the use of various types of technologies, but not substantially about the ones considered essential translation tools (TEnTs, term banks, even concordancers). In general, two thirds (66%) mentioned term banks and concordancers are never requested to be used, and almost half (48%) of participants said they had never been asked to use TEnTs. Interestingly, by filtering answers we could identify that freelancers and recent graduates were the ones reporting more of this type of demand from their clients. This information tells us that clients are somewhat aware of this choice they have (to make such requests). In any case, training programs in universities should be paying attention to this reality and be more responsive to market needs so as to help students be comfortable using multiple tools (Bowker, 2015). The other national research studies (Fernández, 2018 and Vaughn, 2017) did not ask for information in this regard, so this is an issue that needs to be investigated further.

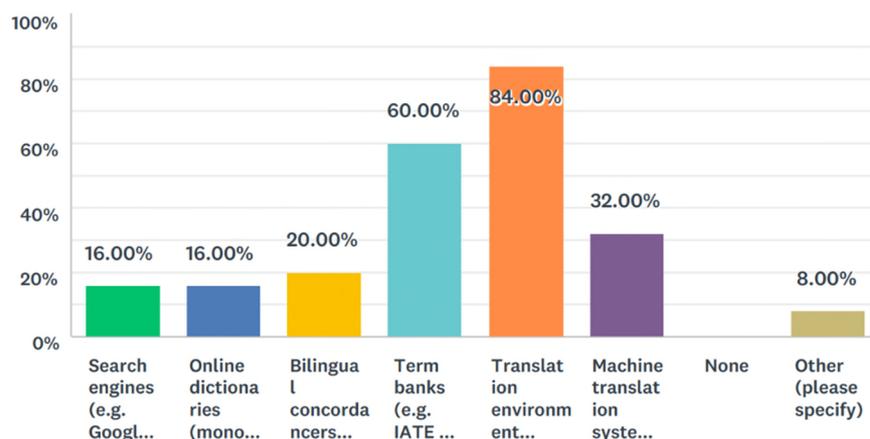


Figure 2: Tools/resources translators wished they had learned more about at university

In order to identify some of the needs professionals think they currently have in regards to technology, we asked about those tools they wished they had learned about at university. The overwhelmingly most selected choice was TEnTs, followed by term banks and then machine translation. Their answers correspond to the same tools that were selected as having less frequency of use. So there may be a high correlation between lack of use and unfamiliarity with such tools. Had they learned them at university, maybe they would be more inclined to use these types of technology. As mentioned before, in the first study conducted on teaching translation technologies only 20% of instructors at university level said that they were teaching TEnTs regularly in classes. Thus, this percentage, although restricted to the sample obtained for that study, may illustrate that there is still some absence of technology in university training courses, while at the same time there are professionals yearning for courses in which universities tackled this issue.

More and more scholars support the idea of aligning university training with market needs (Moustafa Gabr, 2007; Olohan, 2007; Plaza-Lara, 2016), as the last sets the standard and the pace in the field, and it may provide input for the improvement of any training curriculum or syllabus. But there are still gaps that need to be taken care of first in order to bridge the gap between the academia and the market, like well-trained staff and resources (Al-Batineh & Bilali, 2017). I can tell from experience that the gaps mentioned by Al-Batineh & Bilali (2017) are the same in the Mexican context, but we need to learn more about the circumstances university translation programs are facing there.

5 Conclusions

All in all, the two big-scale studies identified reported similar outcomes to this research study in spite of the size of the samples. In regards to profile, they all agree that the Mexican translators mostly work as freelancers and work most with the legal and medicine fields. On the subject of use of technologies, professional translators do not resort to the use of “core” translation technologies very often, but do use other electronic resources useful for accomplishing their tasks. For this particular investigation, translators reported wishing they had learned more about TEnTs in university and reported that some clients are requesting the use of such tools.

How useful is translation technology training in Mexico taking into consideration our research findings? In essence, there is a need reported by a few professionals in these studies, but not being met by some university programs. There is additionally a mismatch in needs in terms of specialized fields, as professionals mostly work on legal and medical fields, but educators reported teaching just a little of specialized fields at college.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Survey about usefulness of technology training in Mexican universities

1. Item used for participants' approval of the ethical conduct of this study.

2. What type of work do you have as a translator/interpreter? Select all that apply.

- Freelancer
 Work for a company
 Work as a teacher
 Work for an agency

3. What kind of university training in translation did you have? Select the one(s) that best describe your profile.

- bachelor's degree
 diploma program
 specialty (graduate one year program)
 master's degree
 doctoral degree
 post-doctoral degree

4. When did you graduate from the last translation program you studied?

- less than three years ago
 less than five years ago
 less than ten years ago
 less than 15 years ago
 less than 20 years ago
 more than 20 years ago

5. What kind of technologies do you use for translation assignments? How often do you use them?

	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Search Engines (like Google, Ask.com)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-line dictionaries (monolingual-Bilingual, like Wordreference or Cambridge)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bilingual concordancers (e.g. Linguee or TradooIT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Term banks (for ex, IATE or TERMIUM Plus)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Translation environment tools (like LogiTerm or Trados)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Machine translation systems (e.g. Google Translate or DeepL)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Translation memory systems (like the ones within Déjà Vu or SDL Trados, for example)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Do your clients/employers request work with any type of technology? How often do they do such requests? Select all that apply.

	All the time	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Search Engines (like Google, Ask.com)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
On-line dictionaries (monolingual-Bilingual, like Wordreference or Cambridge)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bilingual concordancers(e.g. Linguee or TradooIT)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Term banks(for ex, IATE or	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

TERMIUM Plus)

Translation environment tools _____
(like LogiTerm or Trados)

Machine translation systems _____
(e.g. Google Translate or DeepL)

Translation memory systems _____
(like the ones within Déjà Vu or
SDL Trados, for example)

7. What kind of technology do you wish you had learned more at school? Please explain why.

8. After university education, how do you update regarding the use of technologies in translation?

Training courses offered by a translator's association _____

Training courses offered at work _____

I learn by myself _____

Ask for help to a colleague/friend _____

No time for extra-training _____

Another (please, specify) _____

9. Has your knowledge about technology improve your income in the field?

Yes _____ No _____

10. Would you describe yourself as an enthusiast of the use of language technology in translation tasks?

Yes _____ No _____ Why? _____