

Investigating the ergonomics of professional translation: The *ErgoTans* project

The dramatic changes that translation as a profession has undergone in the last two or three decades, evolving from a relatively solitary low-tech activity to one characterized by intensive human-machine interaction within a chain of interlinked agents, has implications for the health and well-being of language practitioners. In a project recently completed in Switzerland, an interdisciplinary team including researchers from translation studies, occupational therapy, and usability testing investigated the workplaces and practices of freelance, institutional, and commercial translators with a view to the cognitive and physical ergonomics of translation.

1) Analysis of existing corpus of translation processes

→ screen recording, eye tracking, keylogging, n=19

Keystrokes/ minute	Switches to mouse/minute	Mouse clicks/ minute	TT words after 15 minutes
70.7	2.5	5.6	92.4

Heavy use of hardware → may cause health problems?
Intensive cognitive work: disturbances and interruptions
detrimentally affect concentration and potentially quality.

2) Workplace observations

→ screen and video recording, ergonomic assessments,
interviews. n=31.

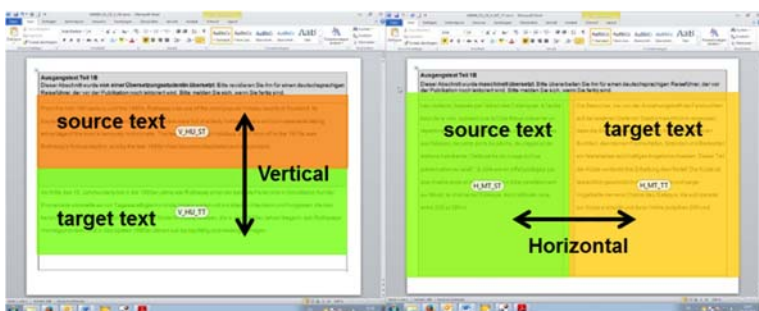
Position	commercial staff translator			
Office size	3 or more people		1-2 people	
CAT tool use	high CAT use	low CAT use	high CAT use	low CAT use
Position	institutional staff translator			
Office size	3 or more people		1-2 people	
CAT use	high CAT use	low CAT use	high CAT use	low CAT use
Position	freelance translator			
Office size	3 or more people		1 person	
CAT tool use	high CAT use	low CAT use	high CAT use	low CAT use

Typical workplace profiles

A profound appreciation of the differences between these profiles is crucial to understanding the situated act of professional translation.

3) Hypothesis testing in usability lab

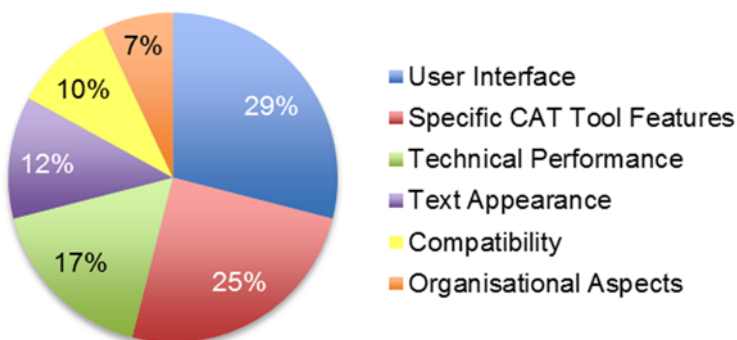
→ screen recording, eye tracking, keylogging, commentaries,
interviews. n=18



Layout (and possibly other features within CAT tool systems) seems to affect gaze patterns and eye-tracking measures.

4) International comparison of workplace ergonomics

→ online survey of professional translators (de, en, es, fr, it, pt). n=1.850



Percentage of comments on irritating CAT tool features (n=931)

The vast majority of CAT tool users find them helpful but the potential benefits are reduced by irritating or missing features and also by translators failing to customise their tools.

Many translators recognize that aspects of their workplaces and computer workstations need to be more ergonomic.

5) Validation of workplace findings

→ in-depth individual and group interviews. n=19

Translators' strategies to cope with ergonomic issues and disturbances at their workplace seem to be influenced by their employment mode. Whereas freelance translators seem to be able to compensate for stressful with more flexible working hours, institutional translators can rely on ergonomically well equipped workplaces and single offices. Commercial translators seem to profit from institutionalised IT support and work breaks.

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For more information and a list of publications, visit www.linguistik.zhaw.ch/ergotrans/en.



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