

INTRODUCTION

This questionnaire for Estonian translators was produced by the European Commission, the Association of Estonian Translation Companies (ETBL), the Department of Translation Studies and Research at the University of Tartu and the Centre for Applied Research in Social Science of the University of Tartu. This is a first-of-a-kind survey targeting Estonian translators and collecting data on their background, experience, skills and needs.

Although Estonian translators are part of the *target group of the annual European Language Industry Survey*, the information gathered in that survey does not make it possible to assess the profile, experience and needs of Estonian translators. So far, there have been no questionnaires or surveys among Estonian translators to describe their background, experience, skills and, consequently, their needs in carrying out translation work. The few previous studies carried out in the Estonian translation landscape have focused on specific aspects, like research into public sector expenditure on translation arrangements or translation services. However, there have been no studies focused on collecting and assessing data on the background of Estonian translators and on the content and methods of their work.

The aim of this study was therefore to gather information on the profile and experience of Estonian translators in carrying out their translation work. The results of the survey give an idea of the kind of texts and subjects the translators work on, the methods they use and the price levels and language trends in their work. Therefore, one of the additional benefits of the survey is that it makes it easier to prepare the European Commission's future translation procurements. In addition, it will give the Commission an overview of the extent to which the Estonian translators have been exposed to the European Commission's translation tools (e.g. eTranslation, IATE) in their current translation work and will help to better promote these tools in the future. The results of the survey also give an overview of what kind of contact and experience the Estonian translators have had with translation and revision of texts of the European Union institutions.

As one of the topics of the survey is also the satisfaction, experience and needs of Estonian translators, the results of the survey will also help to better plan, provide and promote training activities, courses and workshops based on the needs of the target group. In addition, this information will enable the Association of Estonian Translation Companies and the European Commission to take better account of and support the skills, needs and experience of Estonian translators. The results of the study will also be useful for the development of the translation curriculum of Tartu University.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1. Drafting the questionnaire

We based the survey on questions proposed by the Association of Estonian Translation Companies (ETBL) and the European Commission. The survey questions reflect the practical wish and need of the translation companies and the European Commission to get a better understanding of translators in the Estonian translation market. The questions were based on the interests and needs of the requesters of the study. In addition, they followed the international questionnaire of the European

Language Industry Survey to allow for the comparison of the survey results on the years 2019 and 2020. The questionnaire was based on the academic principles of the methodology for preparing questionnaires. It consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions and statements on the Likert scale.

The topics of the survey questionnaire were grouped into five themes:

- 1) translation background and experience of the respondent;
- 2) nature of work and working methods of the respondent;
- 3) managing the work and motivation of the respondent in their work as a translator;
- 4) experience of Estonian translators with European Union translation documents;
- 5) training experience and needs of Estonian translators.

We also selected some background **questions** that would allow us to take into account respondents' length of professional experience and their work experience, as well as their socio-demographic characteristics, and enable us to describe the profile of Estonian translators in general.

The following questions on translator's **background** were asked:

- whether the respondent has translated for a fee over the last year – on the *basis of this question, the authors filtered out the target group of the survey, who were then asked to answer the following questions:*
- respondent's level of education and specialisation;
- respondent's age group;
- respondent's gender;
- respondent's length of professional experience and volume of translation work (during the last year);
- physical location of the respondent's work (either in Estonia, in the European Union or elsewhere);
- language pairs in which the respondent works;
- nature of the contract or legal basis of the respondent's translation work;
- respondent's pay and fees for their translation work;
- respondent's employer(s);
- respondent's clients.

The aim of the **questions on the nature of work and working methods of respondents** was to gather information on normal practices, experience and specificities of the work of Estonian translators and their contact with various translation assistance programs, translation memories, translation engines and terminology bases.

The following questions were asked to explore the respondents' working methods:

- does the respondent specialise in translating texts in a particular field and, if so, in which domain(s);
- what is the respondent's experience in using different translation assistance programmes;
- what is the respondent's usual practice in using translation memories;
- what is the respondent's experience in using different translation engines;
- what is the respondent's experience in using different terminology bases;
- has the respondent used machine translation to edit professionally his/her pre-translated texts.

The purpose of the **questions on managing the work and motivation** was to find out how satisfied the Estonian translators are with the content of and pay for their work, how much time do they spend on each translation job covered by the fee and, as also explored in the international survey of the European language industry, how did their work as a translator differ in 2020 and 2019.

With regard to **managing the work** and motivation, we asked:

- whether translation is the main source of income for the respondent;
- how many hours per week does the respondent spend on translation work;
- what is included in the fee that the respondent charges for their translation work.

We then asked the respondent to assess to what degree do they agree with various statements on a 5-point Likert scale with the values 'fully agree', 'rather agree', 'rather disagree', 'don't agree at all' or 'don't know'.

These statements were:

- I have sufficient translation work.
- I find the pay for translation work fair.
- I am satisfied with my work as a translator.
- I see myself working in the field of translation in five years' time.

After that, we asked the respondent to indicate to what extent their work as a translator differed in 2020 compared to 2019 in certain areas. Again, we used a 5-point Likert scale with the values 'differed significantly', 'differed to some extent', 'no significant differences', 'no difference at all' or 'don't know'.

The areas to compare translation work between 2020 and 2019 were as follows:

- volume of work as a translator;

- fees for translation jobs;
- use of translation assistance programmes in translation work.

In addition, the respondent was able to indicate other areas in which their work differed between 2020 and 2019.

We also asked the translators about their experience with European Union (EU) texts in order to see how many of them have translated for different EU institutions. To filter out respondents with experience in translating EU texts, we first asked:

- whether the respondent has ever translated for EU institutions or is interested in it.

Only those with previous experience in translating texts of the EU institutions were asked to respond to the rest of the questions of this section.

We asked:

- what kind of texts of the EU institutions has the respondent translated.

We then asked the respondent to assess the following statements, using a 6-point Likert scale ('Always', 'Mostly', 'Sometimes', 'Mostly not', 'Not at all' or 'Don't know'):

- The translation request is accompanied by sufficient instructions for the execution of the task.
- I can communicate with the requester during my translation work and ask questions about the text.
- I can view the editor's corrections.
- I receive sufficient feedback on my translation tasks.

In addition, the respondent was able to comment their answers.

The respondent was then asked to indicate, who and to what extent would edit the EU texts they have translated. Again, this was done on a 6-point Likert scale with the values 'Always', 'Mostly', 'Sometimes', 'Rarely', 'Not at all' or 'Don't know'.

The options were:

- language editor;
- another translator;
- the person themselves;
- someone else.

The last question of the section was:

- how much time does the editor have on average to edit the translation.

The aim of the **questions on training experience and needs of the Estonian translators** was to gather information on their experience with various translation-related training activities and courses over the past five years. We also wanted to know what training and courses they would be interested in in the future and how satisfied they were with the availability of information on training opportunities.

We asked the respondent to indicate which translation-related training activities and/or courses they had attended in the last five years and/or in which they would wish to participate. Here, we used a 4-point Likert scale with the values 'I have participated and would like to participate again', 'I have participated and do not consider it necessary to participate again', 'I have not participated, but would like to' or 'I have not participated and do not consider it necessary at the moment'.

The areas of training were:

- translation assistance programmes;
- language training;
- terminology;
- eTranslation;
- use of machine translation;
- machine translation editing;
- other professional training;
- other training courses.

We also asked the respondent:

- whether they consider the information provided on training opportunities to be sufficient.

At the end of the questionnaire, the respondents were able to add comments. They were also invited to leave their contact details (name, e-mail address), in order to participate in the selection of the winner of a translation assistance programme licence, to take place on 30 September 2021 at the time of the presentation of the survey results. This prize was offered by the Association of Estonian Translation Companies.

1.2. Data collection process

The questionnaire was open to respondents on SurveyMonkey online survey platform (named Momentive since 18/08/2021) from 17 May to 14 June 2021. The technical set-up of the questionnaire was prepared by the Centre for Applied Research in Social Science of the University of Tartu. The European Commission and the Association of Estonian Translation Companies (ETBL) made information on the questionnaire available to the target audience. ETBL sent the information by e-mail to more than 70 Estonian translation companies asking them to promote the survey link among their translators. In addition, ETBL shared the survey on its Facebook and blog platforms.

An information notice on the questionnaire was prepared by ETBL. In that notice, the potential respondents were invited to fill in the questionnaire and were informed of the possibility to win a licence for a translation assistance programme.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was the first opportunity to gather information on and provide an overview of the profile, experience, skills and needs of Estonian translators and their experience with translating for the European Union institutions.

According to the responses, the average Estonian translator is a 36-50-year-old female with a degree in philology. The responses show that Estonian translators tend to have a long career, with 22% of respondents having worked as a translator for more than 20 years. However, as roughly the same amount of respondents fall into the different career length groups, we can conclude that there are translators with a wide range of professional experience currently active in Estonia. The workload of Estonian translators is almost universally 1000-2500 pages per year. Most Estonian translators were based in Estonia over the last year, 9% of respondents work in other EU Member States and 3% work elsewhere.

Altogether, the translators involved in the survey work with many languages: 67 language combinations were named. 60% of respondents only use one language pair. The highest number of respondents doing two-way translations (44%) translate between English and Estonian, followed by those translating between Russian and Estonian and Finnish and Estonian. The highest proportion of people doing one-way translations also translate from English into Estonian (29% of respondents). This is followed by German, Russian, Finnish and Swedish into Estonian. Estonian translators tend to work with European languages. The only exception mentioned in the survey was Japanese.

Almost half of the respondents are self-employed. More than one third of respondents work for an agency or under a contract for services and just under a quarter have an employment contract.

The majority (85%) of respondents is paid per page, per letter and/or per word. They usually earn a gross amount of EUR 9-11 or EUR 6-8 per page. Only 15% of respondents receive a monthly salary, with more than half of them having a gross salary of less than EUR 1500 per month.

More than half of Estonian translators work for translation companies (56%), while almost half (48%) are self-employed. The main clients of self-employed translators are Estonian clients who approach them directly or via translation companies.

Just over a half of respondents are specialised in translating sector-specific texts, with the largest number of them specialising in legal and technical texts.

Concerning the use of translation assistance programs, translation engines and terminology bases, it seems that Estonian translators usually have one or two main preferences, which they use much more frequently. The favourite translation programmes are SDL and MemoQ, used respectively by 56% and 50% of respondents. Google translation engine is by far the most used translation engine, with less than 20% of respondents using other translation engines. The most popular terminology bases are the Esterm terminology base (used by 86% of respondents) and the EUR-Lex website (81%). Almost half of respondents to the survey tend to use Esterm always or most of the time.

As regards the use of project translation memories, the respondents usually create them themselves (70%). However, 20% of respondents have never used project translation memories in their work. Just over half of respondents have edited machine-translated texts during their work.

For just over a half of the translators responding to the survey, translation is the only source of income. Nearly half of them tend to translate 30-40 hours per week. However, more than a quarter of translators work for more than 40 hours per week. Roughly half of the respondents for whom translation work is not the only source of income, tend to spend less than 10 hours per week on translation.

Estonian translators generally appear to be satisfied with their work, with only 14% of respondents generally not satisfied with their work as a translator. A large majority (80%) are satisfied with the amount of work and 76% of respondents see translation as a promising career path, i.e. they see themselves working as a translator in five years' time. However, more than half of respondents do not consider the pay for translation to be fair. For more than half of Estonian translators, the price they charge for translation also includes making corrections based on client feedback and doing quality control.

For the respondents, the year 2020 did not differ significantly from 2019 in terms of work. Just over half of them observed changes in the volume of work, but they attributed this mainly to family circumstances, changes due to the health situation and the dynamic nature of their work. According to the majority of translators, the price of translation work also remained stable, and there were no noticeable changes in the use of translation assistance programmes in their work.

Less than half of respondents (39%) have translated for European Union institutions. However, 17% of those who have not yet translated EU texts would like to do that. The majority of EU texts translated came from the European Commission. Half of the translators having worked on EU texts also have experience of translating texts for the European Parliament. According to the majority of respondents who have translated EU texts, they usually receive sufficient instructions in the translation request to complete the task successfully. At the same time, the possibilities to communicate with the requester vary considerably depending on the requester, with no consistent pattern emerging. While more than half of respondents normally receive sufficient feedback on their EU translation work, almost a quarter consider that they do not receive any feedback in most cases. In the experience of 57% of respondents, a language editor edits the EU texts that they have translated, while a quarter always edit their own work.

According to the results of the survey, the respondents have mostly not attended any translation-specific training, but almost a third would like to do so. The highest interest was shown in terminology training. So far, the respondents have mostly participated in language and other

professional training. In addition, it seems that information on training available in the field of translation has not always reached the Estonian translators: 42% of respondents consider that information on training is not sufficiently available and 41% are unable to comment on the issue.

It should, however, be noted that the results of this survey are based solely on the experience of those Estonian translators who responded to the survey ($n=308$) and on their observations and can therefore not be generalised to all Estonian translators. It is also apparent from the free-form answers that often the specific details of the job and the pay for it depend on the requester of the job and on the individual employer, and that the profile of the translator (training and work experience, etc.) also have an influence. Overall, it can be concluded that the work of an Estonian translator is very dynamic and often the nature and conditions of the work may vary depending on the specificities of the project.