# Translation into a non-native language

IAPTI's Ethics Committee, January 2015
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*This document presents a summary of the results of a survey on translation into a non-native language, conducted in February and March 2014. The data were collected through SurveyMonkey over a ten-day period, from February 28 to March 10. More than 780 respondents completed the survey. The sample was sufficiently large to split into various subsamples according to experience, certification status, and native language in order to identify major factors and tendencies beyond overall averages.*

*Only a limited number of such subsamples are presented in the report below. However, the data can be filtered according to any meaningful customized criteria. Given that the respondents' generous contributions enabled IAPTI to collect this information, we will be pleased to return the favor and check any specific correlations that might interest our colleagues.*

*Survey respondents offered a multitude of different viewpoints, and provided deep insight into many aspects. While it would have been impossible to present each individual answer, we aimed to provide a balanced selection of comments (typeset in blue). All the citations in this summary are taken verbatim from the survey replies; only a small number of obvious typos have been corrected.*

*Comments on the survey itself, the current analysis, or the topic in general are welcome at attila dot piroth [at] iapti dot org.*

*Acknowledgments: On behalf of IAPTI and the Ethics Committee, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the many translators around the world who completed the survey. IAPTI greatly appreciates their generosity in both answering the questions and complementing them with detailed, frank and insightful views. I would also like to thank my fellow IAPTI Ethics Committee members, Maria Karra for suggestions on designing and improving the survey, and Vivian Stevenson for final editing and comments.*

*Sincerely,*
*Attila Piróth*

# Results

## Q1. How long have you been a translator?

| | |
|---|---|
| I am not a translator | 1 |
| Not yet started | 5 |
| Less than 1 year | 17 |
| 1-3 years | 64 |
| 3-5 years | 80 |
| 5-10 years | 180 |
| 10-15 years | 142 |
| 15-20 years | 105 |
| 20-30 years | 124 |
| More than 30 years | 58 |
| | |
| **Number of respondents** | **776** |
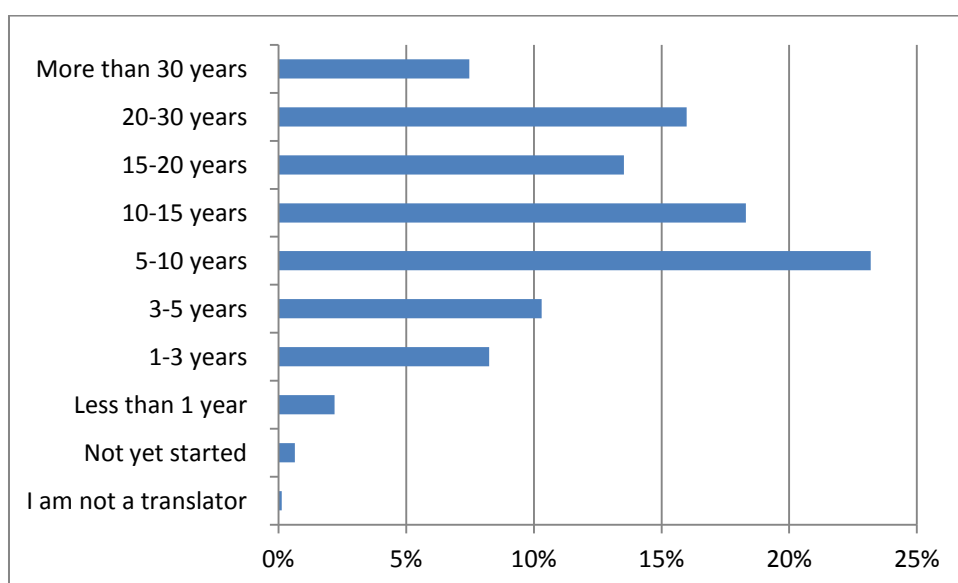


**Observation:** *Using mid-interval values (and 35 years for the "more than 30 years" category), this corresponds to an average experience of 13.59 years – and a total of more than 10,000 years!*

## *Q2. What education degree do you have? [Select all that apply]*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| University/college degree/certificate in translation | 375 | 48.32% |
| University/college degree/certificate in languages | 304 | 39.18% |
| University/college degree/certificate in another field | 294 | 37.89% |
| Currently working on my university/college degree/certificate | 22 | 2.84% |
| Don't have and don't work on a university/college degree/certificate | 38 | 4.90% |
| | | |
| **Number of respondents** | **776** | |
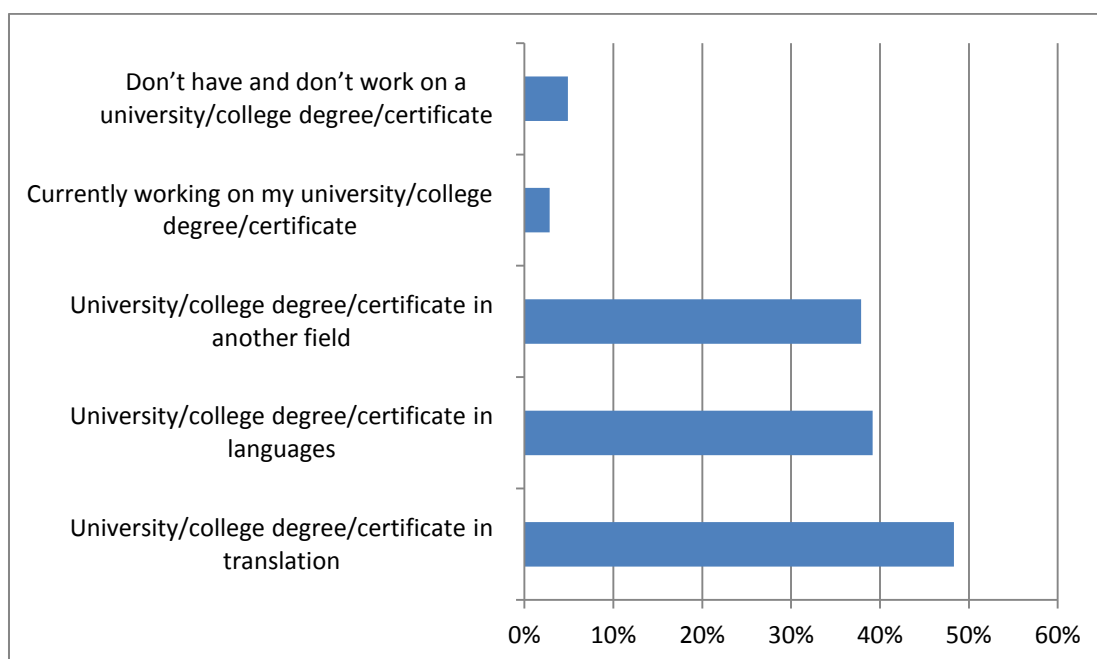


**Observation:** *Well over 90% of the respondents have one or more university degrees/certificates.*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I am certified by a translator organization (ATA, IoL, etc.) | 164 | 21.64% |
| I am a member of a national or international translator association (ATA, IAPTI, IoL, ITI, SFT, etc.) | 405 | 53.43% |
| I am a "Certified Pro" at ProZ | 307 | 40.50% |
| I am a paying member of one or more translation-related websites (ProZ, GoTranslators, Translators Café, etc.) | 364 | 48.02% |
| I have a profile on social media sites (LinkedIn, Facebook) | 572 | 75.46% |
| Other | 63 | 8.31% |
| | | |
| **Number of respondents** | **776** | |
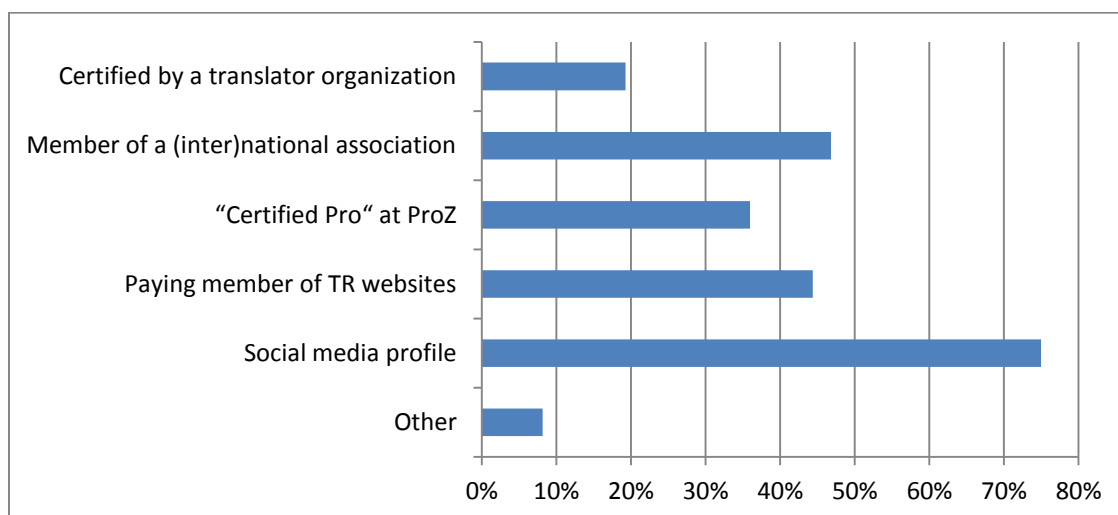


**Sample comments**

*I have 64 year daily experience and reputation. Don't need anything else.*

I have a widely read blog on professional translation.

*Please note that there is no certification system by translators organizations in France, where I work.*

I also belong to Stridonium.

*I am a lawyer (member of the Bar).*

## Q4-Q5. What is your country of origin? What is your country of residence?

73 countries of origin and 80 countries of residence were named:

| Country of origin | | | Country of residence | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| UK | 97 | | USA | 98 |
| USA | 83 | | UK | 87 |
| Germany | 62 | | Germany | 51 |
| Italy | 48 | | France | 38 |
| Brazil | 39 | | Italy | 35 |
| France | 31 | | Brazil | 34 |
| Hungary | 31 | | Spain | 34 |
| Poland | 26 | | The Netherlands | 32 |
| Argentina | 25 | | Hungary | 27 |
| The Netherlands | 25 | | Portugal | 26 |
| Portugal | 23 | | Argentina | 20 |
| Sweden | 18 | | Canada | 18 |
| Greece | 16 | | Poland | 18 |
| Spain | 15 | | Sweden | 18 |
| Belgium | 14 | | Greece | 16 |
| Canada | 14 | | Australia | 13 |
| Russia | 13 | | Macedonia | 11 |
| Macedonia | 12 | | Norway | 11 |
| Norway | 12 | | Belgium | 10 |
| Romania | 11 | | Russia | 10 |
| **53 other countries** | **148** | | **60 other countries** | **158** |

Below is a pie chart of the country of residence.
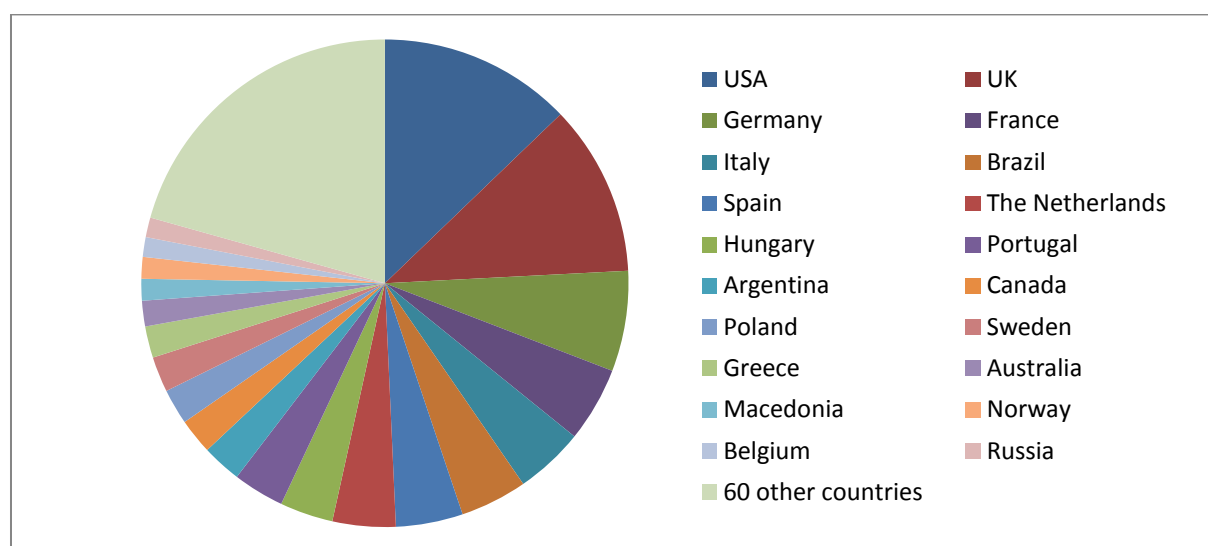


**Observation:** *The country of origin and the country of residence were **different** for **42.8%** of the respondents (329 of 769).*

*Q6. How many languages do you consider to be your native language?*

**Definition:** *For people who were born and raised in a monolingual environment until the end of their studies, the concept of native language is straightforward. For the purposes of this survey, any other person who can justifiably claim to possess indistinguishable language skills from such educated native speakers is also considered a native speaker. (If you find this definition inadequate, please add a comment below)*

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | 2 |
| 1 | 629 |
| 2 | 140 |
| 3 or more | 9 |
| | |
| Total | 780 |

**Observation:** *The two respondents who chose "0" named a native language in the next question. Therefore they seem to belong to the group with one native language.*



**Number of native languages**

■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

1%

18%

81%
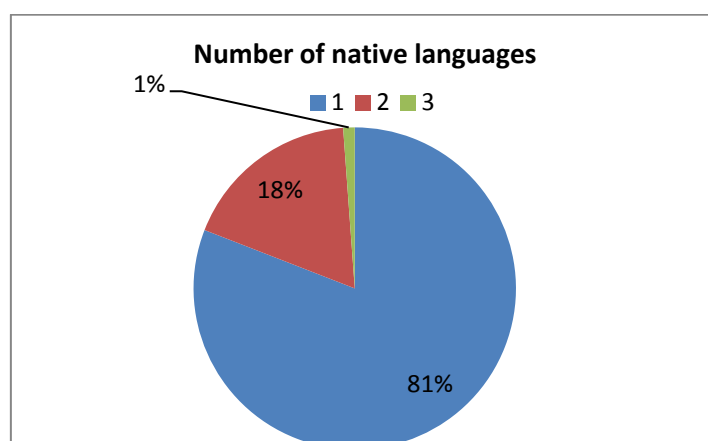
**Sample comments**

*In linguistics and child development, we usually speak of a "first language" or "L1" (children can have more than one first language), aka native language, mother language, etc. A first language is a language into which one is born, in which one is raised by a family speaking the same L1, and in which one is immersed fully before the onset of puberty. A family can have more than one L1 in the case of multilingual families, but the child must still be born into a family where those L1s are spoken by family members, and the child must still be fully immersed in those L1s before the onset of puberty. Any language acquired after puberty cannot be an L1 because of the nature of brain development and language acquisition. In field such as translation, we sometimes speak of native-equivalency in an L2. An L2 remains a nonnative or nonfirst language, but human beings are perfectly capable of learning an L2 to an extremely high level of fluency and knowledge. Translators should never claim an L2 is an L1, but a translator's skills in an L2 can be native-equivalent.*

IMO the concept of native language in the translation realm is mere foolishness. Too many people use their "native speaker" attribute to conceal or mitigate some lack of competence as translators. If the way the "native speaker" requirement is used in the translation industry held any water, all aircraft pilots would necessarily be birds, not humans.

*I think that the phrase "who can justifiably claim" is problematic. I am certainly aware of people who claim to "possess indistinguishable language skills from such educated native speakers" and who apparently think that claim is justified when most "educated native speakers" would consider it risible. Also, "until the end of their studies" presupposes a classic progression of kindergarten > primary school > secondary school > university > postgrad studies. Life is not like that for everyone and some of us consider that education should only end with senility or death. Not all students who go to university abroad succeed in becoming fluent in the language of their university education.*

[One native language, Serbian] Unless, of course, I add what is called Bosnian, Montenegrin, and Croatian to my "native corpus". It used to be one language until 1991 (Serbo-Croatian).

*I find the definition itself acceptable, but people's estimations of themselves and their own abilities are often erroneous. Therein lies the rub!*

Even bilingual translators/persons have one "stronger" language, as far as I know from other professionals in this field.

*I believe 'native' is your childhood language. Though I'm an expert English writer and speaker, and an excellent French one, I believe it's almost impossible to reach the same competences you have acquired in your first language. Sometimes, if you live for a long time fully immersed in another language, you might be bilingual. But that does not make you native, for you lack the extra deep information a translator needs, meaning history, culture, politics, family talk and such things, connected to your own life experience in a language, besides everyday talk – updated daily, through personal contact, media exposure, whatever.*

I was born and grew up in Italy (up to the age of 19) but I have now been resident in the UK for 36 years. I now consider English to be my "adopted" native language. I believe that the concept of "native language" is flawed because language, like all acquired skills, is something that needs practice as well as aptitude. For example, although I still have a native understanding of Italian, I no longer consider myself sufficiently prepared to translate into Italian.

*Any language which has been spoken actively through long-term immersion, with accompanying cultural integration, enhanced by formal or informal studies in the language.*

I think that "For people who were born and raised in a monolingual environment until the end of their studies, the concept of native language is straightforward." is an incomplete statement. What studies are we talking about? Undergraduate? Graduate? Also, I think that the following should be added to the definition of native speaker of a language: 'a proficient user of such language'.

*My native language is German, but I would call English my language of habitual use as I spent most of my adult life in UK and my higher education and work experience is all from UK.*

Native language is clear in its definition, however, the concept is archaic and this should be changed to first language, i.e. the speaker's dominant language (one used daily, including for business, and the language they feel most at home in/identify most with. (E.g. some people emigrate not only for work reasons but also because they may feel more of an affinity with their adopted country, effectively feeling more at home there than they do in their native country).

*A language spoken from birth by a person living in the country of that language for most of their lives.*

A native language which you speak at home with your small family. It is the language in which you pronounced the first words and learned it even before you know how to speak.

*I was raised in a bilingual Polish-English household but have never felt as confident with Polish having never 'formally' learned the rules of grammar.*

In any language, a person is the most proficient when it comes to his/her specialist fields. So a specialty is more relevant than having a native language.

*I consider myself a "near-native" speaker because my Spanish is not "perfect", but I notice that native speakers make mistakes, too.*

Native languages are the ones you are born AND educated with, a language of which you not only have total command, but also a full capacity to express all kinds of nuances.

*There is no perfect definition of a "native" language, and I find the concept "native", especially when used to assess someone's quality or translation skills, downright nonsensical. It is an overused, overhyped word with little significance.*

**Observation:** *The concept of "educated native speaker" naturally raises the question: what level of education should this refer to? Based on the statistics obtained in Q2, a case can be made for setting this level at a university/college degree.*

*Q7-Q9. What is your native language? / What is your second native language? / If you have any further native languages, list them here. [If you want to specify a variant, please use this format: "Portuguese / Brazilian".]*

**Observation:** *46 different languages were listed as first native language, and 60 as first/second/third native language.*

| First native language | | | 1st/2nd/3rd native language | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English | 224 | | English | 286 |
| German | 72 | | German | 86 |
| Spanish | 63 | | Spanish | 80 |
| Portuguese | 59 | | Portuguese | 64 |
| Italian | 47 | | French | 54 |
| French | 39 | | Italian | 52 |
| Dutch | 36 | | Dutch | 42 |
| Hungarian | 35 | | Hungarian | 35 |
| Polish | 27 | | Polish | 31 |
| Swedish | 19 | | Russian | 24 |
| Russian | 18 | | Swedish | 20 |
| Greek | 17 | | Greek | 18 |
| Norwegian | 12 | | Norwegian | 15 |
| Macedonian | 11 | | Macedonian | 12 |
| Arabic | 10 | | Romanian | 12 |
| Romanian | 9 | | Arabic | 11 |
| Chinese | 7 | | Czech | 11 |
| Slovak | 7 | | Chinese | 8 |
| Czech | 6 | | Slovak | 8 |
| Bulgarian | 5 | | Bulgarian | 6 |
| Croatian | 4 | | Serbian | 6 |
| Finnish | 4 | | Croatia | 5 |
| Turkish | 4 | | Finnish | 5 |
| Danish | 3 | | Danish | 4 |
| Hebrew | 3 | | Turkish | 4 |
| Japanese | 3 | | Ukrainian | 4 |
| Serbian | 3 | | Catalan | 3 |
| Indonesian | 2 | | Hebrew | 3 |
| Ukrainian | 2 | | Hindi | 3 |
| Albanian | 1 | | Japanese | 3 |
| Belarusian | 1 | | Belarusian | 2 |
| Catalan | 1 | | Galician | 2 |
| Estonian | 1 | | Indonesian | 2 |
| Haitian-Creole | 1 | | Latvian | 2 |
| Hindi | 1 | | Serbo-Croat | 2 |
| Korean | 1 | | Tagalog | 1 |
| Kurdish | 1 | | Afrikaans | 1 |
| Latvian | 1 | | Albanian | 1 |
| Lithuanian | 1 | | Basque | 1 |
| Luxembourgish | 1 | | Bavarian | 1 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marathi | 1 | | Bosnian | 1 |
| Persian | 1 | | East Frisian | 1 |
| Serbo-Croat | 1 | | Estonian | 1 |
| Tagalog | 1 | | Frysian | 1 |
| Tajik | 1 | | Gujarati | 1 |
| Telugu | 1 | | Haitian-Creole | 1 |
| | | | Hunanese | 1 |
| | | | Korean | 1 |
| | | | Kurdish | 1 |
| | | | Lithuanian | 1 |
| | | | Low German | 1 |
| | | | Luxembourgish | 1 |
| | | | Maltese | 1 |
| | | | Marathi | 1 |
| | | | Persian | 1 |
| | | | Scots | 1 |
| | | | Tajik | 1 |
| | | | Telugu | 1 |
| | | | Uzbek | 1 |
| | | | | |
| **Total (for 46 first native languages)** | **768** | | **Total (for 60 1st/2nd/3rd native language)** | **950** |

Below is a pie chart of for all (1st/2nd/3rd) native languages.
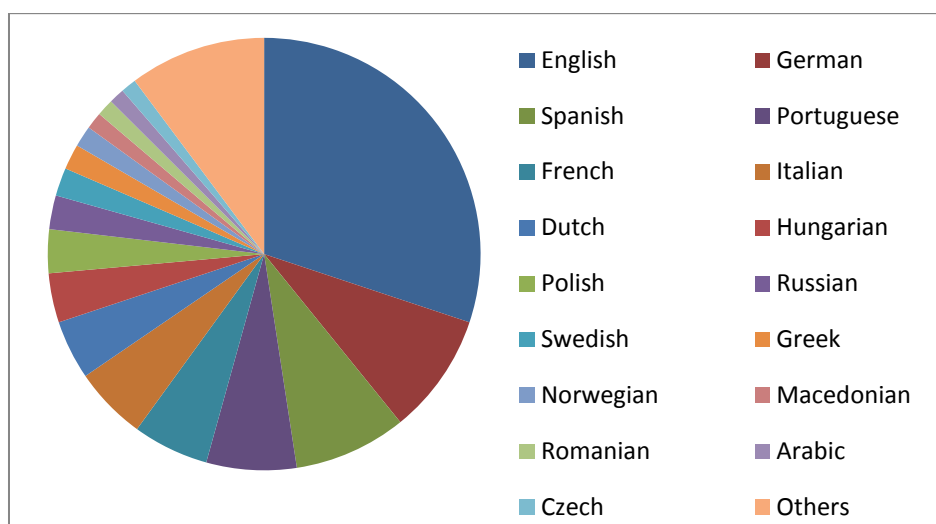


**Observations:** *1. Catalan was mentioned by three translators as a second native language. Due to its particular status (over 10 million native speakers, of whom the majority also speaks Spanish as a native language), a number of interesting correlation hypotheses could have been tested in the Catalan-speaking subsample if it had been considerably larger.*
*2. Few respondents named a variant, therefore this piece of information was not used in the analysis.*

*Q10. If you have more than one native language, do you translate into each? [Select one option, and add further details in the Comments field]*

| | |
|---|---|
| Yes, I offer exactly the same services in each target language | 71 |
| Yes, but I offer more extensive services in one of them | 56 |
| No, I only work into one of them | 49 |
| Not applicable/other | 365 |

Without the "non-applicable/other" group, the pie chart of the answers looks like this:



- Yes, same services
- Yes but more extensive services into one
- No, only work into one
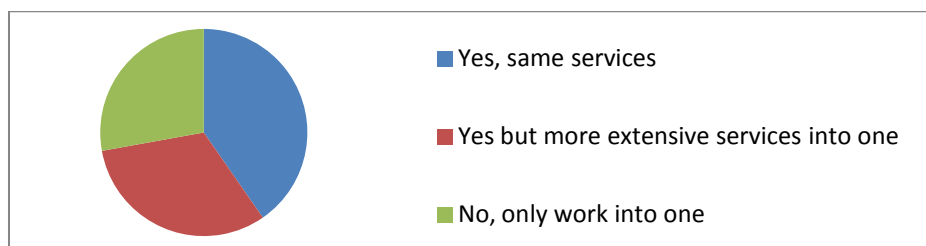
**Sample comments**

*Due to the specific and touchy nature of the reasons why the languages of the former Yugoslavia split and took their specific development paths, I tend to limit myself to Serbia's market only. Even though, the languages spoken in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia are actually one and the same language with very small differences, they qualify for localization – maybe this is one of the rare cases where the word "localization" actually makes sense.*

[French & German, Same services] I write French better and I "feel" the language better, but I have less vocabulary than in German. I am happy to work within a team with my husband, as I sometimes do not feel secure in none of both languages.

*Language, like all acquired skills, need continuous practice. Although I still have a native understanding of Italian, I no longer consider myself sufficiently prepared to translate into Italian.*

[English & Polish, Only work into one of them] I spent the majority of my life in English-speaking countries and was taught the rules of English grammar, spelling, punctuation, register, etc. at school and through university. I have never had this experience with Polish so, although I understand it as well as I understand English, it is more difficult for me to write in Polish without having the strong basis of grammar and other rules that I have in English. Reading Polish comes naturally to me, but formulating sentences coherently (syntax, semantics) is a little more difficult!

*[No] I type on a QWERTY key board, which is not ideal when typing a French text. Using an AZERTY key board, would force me to 'unlearn' the touch typing skills I built up in English, or else be prepared to have to fix the inevitable interference resulting between the two.*

[Brazilian Portuguese & US English, Same services] What triggered it was having passed the exam and been appointed a sworn translator/interpreter in Brazil. From that moment on, the law says that I MUST translate in both directions. Until then, I didn't have much demand for translating into my L2, and was not overly concerned about it.

*There is not a lot interest translating into Basque because the main language in the zone in Spanish.*

[German & English, Only work into one of them] I used to be a lawyer in the UK and now translate only legal texts. Find it easier to translate into English in this field.

*[English & Spanish, More extensive services in one of them] Demand is higher.*

Because I do not regard my proficiency in my 'second native' language as up to professional level in all fields, and I have enough work to do translating into my 'real' native language. There are plenty of colleagues who translate better into my 'second native' language. My first native language is English, and English speakers often disapprove of translating out of one's native language. (This does not stop me doing it occasionally, and I have no problems with others who do it.)

*Despite being fully bilingual, I have found a niche and normally do academic or literary translations from Spanish into English.*

Although my Portuguese is at native level, all my education was in the UK and I am marginally more comfortable writing in English. After offering only PT-EN translation for many years it is now much more difficult for me to translate in the opposite direction, takes me more time and pays less due to a huge number of competitors.

*I have a bigger into-English market. Besides, it was always an observation in the bilingual population I belong to that good English speakers do not make the best Tagalog.*

I am a heritage speaker of Latvian, and although I use the language on a daily basis (reading, writing, speaking), I was educated primarily in English and have not lived in Latvia. Therefore, I only translate more general/less complicated texts such as certificates and diplomas FROM Latvian into English, never into Latvian.

*I am ATA certified for G<>E, but I restrict myself to G>E. I may consider a very easy translation E>G (non-technical) and I have done some editing E>G, but that would be an exception, rather than the rule.*

I am not as "flexible" and creative linguistically speaking in my second mother tongue, so I don't offer marketing translations. I also always have my work into English proofread and organise proofreading myself.

*I can offer the same services because I've used both languages at school, university… but actually there's more work translating into Spanish.*

I find that I am more fluent in some subjects in one language than another, based on where I interacted with the concept more.

*[English & Spanish, Same services] I have been thoroughly tested and qualified as having "Native" proficiency in both. Otherwise I wouldn't.*

I'm not comfortable translating into my 'first' native language as I haven't lived in the country where that language is spoken for a very long time and am much more at home in my 'second' native language, which is also my language of habitual use and the only language my family (including my children) speak.

| No | 351 | 45.47% |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, 1 | 344 | 44.56% |
| Yes, 2 | 64 | 8.29% |
| Yes, 3+ | 13 | 1.68% |
| | | |
| **Total** | **772** | |
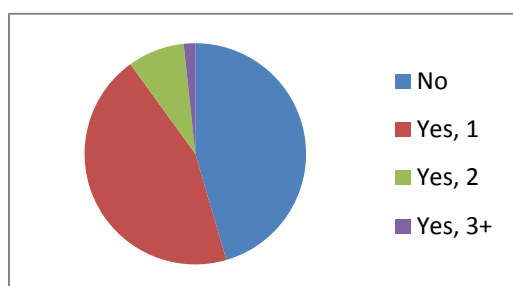


While the overall percentages are important, significant variations were expected among different subsamples. To explore this, a number of hypotheses were tested.

a) Are the percentages different among those whose country of origin is different from their country of residence? (They make up over 40% of the entire sample population, as mentioned in Q5-Q6).

| No | 162 | 49.09% |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, 1 | 146 | 44.24% |
| Yes, 2 | 17 | 5.15% |
| Yes, 3+ | 5 | 1.52% |
| | | |
| Total | 330 | |
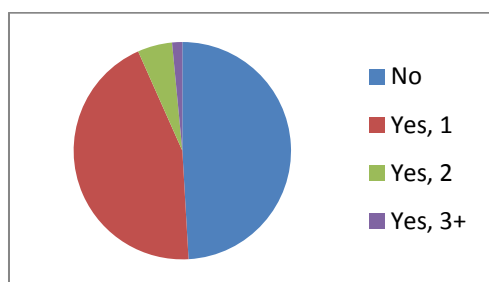


b) Are the percentages different among those who are certified by a translator association (ATA, CIoL, etc.)?

| No | 92 | 56.10% |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, 1 | 64 | 39.02% |
| Yes, 2 | 6 | 3.66% |
| Yes, 3+ | 2 | 1.22% |
| | | |
| Total | 164 | |

**Observation:** *Only a few translators' organizations have certification programs; the best known are ATA, CIoL and ITI. These three organizations only offer exams in language pairs where English is either the source or the target language. Therefore a certain correlation between certification status and native language is expected.*
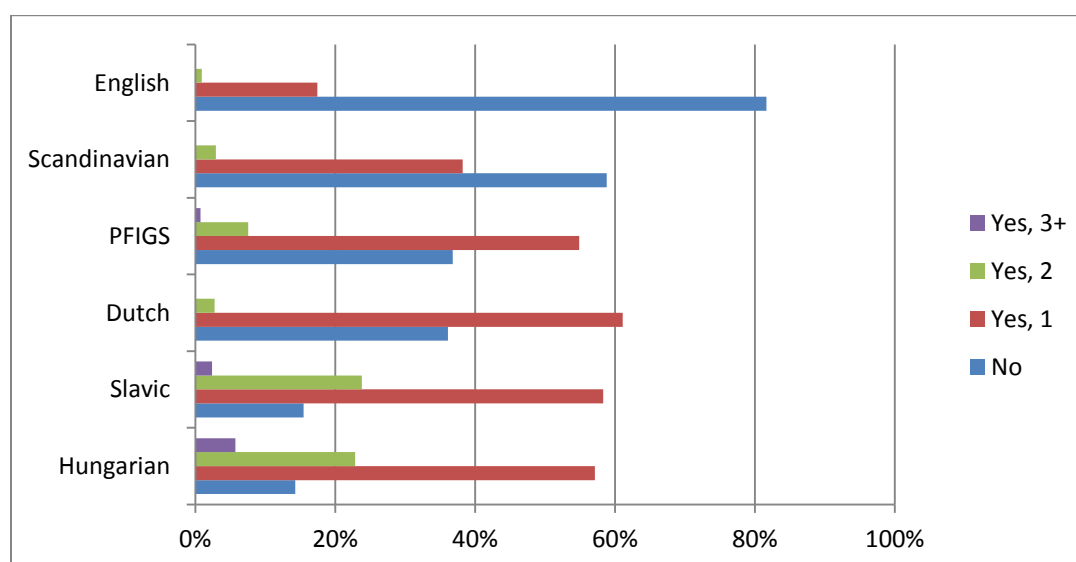
c) Do the percentages depend on native language?

For practical purposes, the following native language groups were used:

- English
- PFIGS (Portuguese, French, Italian, German, Spanish)
- Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish)
- Slavic languages (Belarusian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Macedonian, Polish, Serbian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak, Slovenian, Russian, Ukrainian – but not the Baltic languages)
- Dutch
- Hungarian

This classification provided convenient subsamples, and can be justified to some extent either by common linguistic roots (Scandinavian, Slavic) or by common practices in the translation market (PFIGS being the primary group of target languages for translations of English-language source material). Within these groups, significant differences may exist, so some statistics have been broken down into individual native languages.

|         | English | Scandinavian | PFIGS  | Dutch  | Slavic | Hungarian |
|---------|---------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|-----------|
| **No**    | 81.65%  | 58.82%       | 36.82% | 36.11% | 15.48% | 14.29%    |
| **Yes, 1**  | 17.43%  | 38.24%       | 54.87% | 61.11% | 58.33% | 57.14%    |
| **Yes, 2**  | 0.92%   | 2.94%        | 7.58%  | 2.78%  | 23.81% | 22.86%    |
| **Yes, 3+** | 0.00%   | 0.00%        | 0.72%  | 0.00%  | 2.38%  | 5.71%     |



We also checked whether the percentages for a given native language (English) or a group (PFIGS) depended on certification status.

|  | English | English certified | PFIGS | PFIGS certified |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No** | 81.65% | 87.50% | 36.82% | 40.30% |
| **Yes, 1** | 17.43% | 10.94% | 54.87% | 56.72% |
| **Yes, 2** | 0.92% | 1.56% | 7.58% | 1.49% |
| **Yes, 3+** | 0.00% | 0.00% | 0.72% | 1.49% |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Sample size** | 218 | 64 | 277 | 67 |

**Observation:** *Living in a country that is different from one's country of origin has a minor influence on translators' choice of offering translation services into a non-native language. Certification status has a moderate influence. Native language, on the other hand, has a major impact on this choice.*
*It should be noted that this question addressed translators' willingness to translate into a non-native language. As seen from the comments, several translators take on such work only very rarely and under exceptional circumstances. From Q14, we will explore the actual volumes that this practice represents.*

**Sample comments**

*Again, the hallmark of a professional translator is excellent writing skills, and achieving a "native" level of excellence is almost impossible for non-natives. I have been correcting translation certification examinations in Canada for close to 15 years, and have encountered only one instance in which a person's level of ability, in writing, was almost '"native." One.*

I am Italian mother-tongue and when I started translating, 15 years ago, I had a couple of clients who asked me to translate from Italian into English. I did it for a while, but soon stopped because I knew the result was not good. It's common here, when you start, to translate into English too, because direct clients want only that – and cannot tell the difference with a text translated by a mother-tongue. The clients thought that an English mother-tongue could not understand clearly their Italian text, and so they wanted the texts to be translated by an Italian. It's fairly common in Italy for direct clients to reason like that. Then comes an English customer that doesn't understand their texts... and they change their mind. But it takes a money loss to have them understand.

*Into Latin, which hardly has any native speakers any more.*

Of my nearly 15 years as a translator, editor and project manager, I have seen the work of some roughly 500 translators. I can attest only three (3) (ONLY 3!) of that lot were capable enough to translate into a non-native language competently.

*I have done this once or twice, into Spanish, following considerable pressure from the client and after telling them clearly why I didn't think this was a good idea. Each time, I had a Spanish native speaker proofread the target text before delivery. This is not a service I advertise, or even want to provide. I will only do it as a last resort and as a favour for a good client.*

[Native language: French] I translate into English and have a native speaker tweak my work. I'm almost native-level but "almost" isn't enough without the final tweak.

*I have translated into English in the past, because **I was in a condition in which I could not reject work**. Now I never translate into a non native language, but I do interpret into non native languages.*

But only for one direct client, for whom I used to work as an employee in a target language country (my usual source language) and for whom I have done probably millions of words in the more conventional direction (!) and only short texts in an emergency where reversing my TM does half the work for me.

*Exemption: Very technical texts, for the translation of which my scientific /technical background is more important than an impeccable, native style. Most often these texts are very dry (lists, MSDS etc.). If not I try to avoid them.*

However, I HAVE once translated an extremely small job into my husband's native language, in a field I was rather familiar with, as a favour to a friend who was in a desperate situation. I had my husband review the target text for me, and made sure that the client was aware that this was a one-off situation and not one that I felt to be ideal. In the end it turned out fine, but I would have refused flat out if the circumstances had been any different.

I have a native speaker checking the translation before submitting it to the client.

*I consider it unprofessional to translate into one's non-native language, unless it's a true emergency for someone. The resulting prose NEVER reads native – and believe me, I've edited and proofread an awful lot of writing by pretty good non-native speakers and writers.*

I have an established customer relationship and they need the native speaker understanding of the source text. I send the work I do to an editor who is a native speaker in the target language. With some back and forth communication, it works.

*[Native language: German] I only translate into my non-native language. Many people find that hard to believe but I simply have had more practice translating into my non-native language than vice versa. I left the country where I was born and raised in the early 1990s. While I have by no means severed ties with my native country, I am more in touch with the culture of the country I live in and it's easier for me to translate into the language that reflects the culture I am immersed in.*

*I used to translate into my non-native languages in the past, but I avoid doing it. Unfortunately, in Bulgaria it is common that Bulgarians translate into English, Spanish, etc., even though they are not native in these languages.*

I'm ATA certified for translation from my native language into one of my "B" languages.

*Into English, only scientific-medical texts*

*Only for volunteer work where it is likely they would not get a native speaker anyway and it would likely have been translated by someone who isn't a translator nor a native speaker. I always warn them that English is not my native language and that it would be wise to have it read through by a native speaker.*

ONLY when I have someone **more qualified** to edit

*Since I have my Cambridge Proficiency certificate, I'm a so-called near-native speaker of English.*

Sometimes – only into English. But only certain texts. Nothing legally binding ...

## Q12. Do you translate from your native language into a non-native language (L1->L2)?

| | |
|---|---|
| No | 321 |
| Yes, but only in a narrow niche field in which I am a subject-matter expert | 186 |
| Yes, in various fields | 216 |
| Yes, in all fields | 44 |
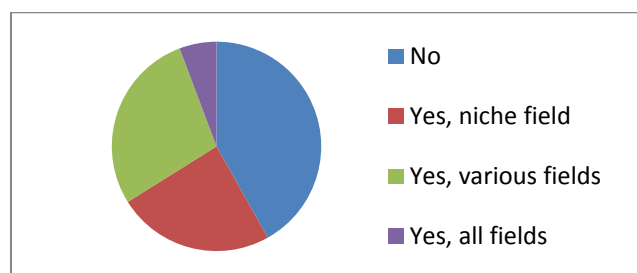


**Observation:** *Several respondents seemed to be at a loss as to why this question was different from the previous one. First, the source language (L1) was specified here but not in Q11. Second, Q11 focused on the number of non-native target languages, whereas Q12 focused on the subject fields.*

**Sample comments**

*[Source language: Italian] I have to. It is the policy of the translation agency I work at.*

90% of my translations are from my native language German into my non-native language English. They are all in the medical field, and having worked for many years in hospitals in Switzerland I understand the "medical language" really well, including the insinuations and abbreviations. I actually think it is very difficult for a non-native German speaker to correctly understand everything in such a highly specialized source text, and I frequently see that when I proofread documents translated by translators whose native language is not German and who do not have a background in the medical field.

*[Native language: Polish] I got my CPE in my late teens, taught some, worked some in English, wasted my youth away on the Internet with its many message boards. Played untranslated games and used untranslated software, read the classics as a teenager, and so on and so forth, so I basically have what it takes to write well, although there are areas I don't touch. You won't see me translating novels, poems, subtitles and so on.*

Two fields only: Nuclear Engineering and Cosmetics (very specific jobs, occasional work, generally short translations).

*I feel competent enough to translate non-literary texts into English, provided I am versed enough in the subject matter.*

I translate from Hungarian into English texts related to law, economics, literature, linguistics, art, history and culture in general.

*Either translate very basic texts or into my specialist area*

My strategies when translating into L2 include:

- using corpora to check collocations.

- using parallel texts (e.g. webpages on the same subject) to reproduce the register.

- consulting with other colleagues in the team or with the client, if available.

*[Native language: Turkish] I translate only in certain tech/engineering fields where linguistic aesthetics is insignificant. I only guarantee the accuracy of the content but not the linguistic quality. My clients know what to expect and willingly consent to it.*

Yes, in extremely rare cases where it is more convenient for a client (usually a deadline issue and "very rare" = 1-3 times per year

*Q13-14. Do you offer translations from a non-native language into another non-native language (L3->L2)? (Please specify the language pair.)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No | 634 | 82.66% |
| Yes, but only in a narrow niche field in which I am a subject-matter expert | 78 | 10.17% |
| Yes, in various fields | 48 | 6.26% |
| Yes, in all fields | 7 | 0.91% |
| Total | 767 | |
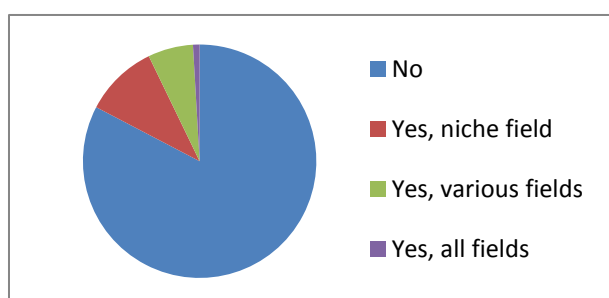


**Observation:** *Q11 showed that the willingness to translate into a non-native language correlates strongly with one's native language. Therefore it makes sense to break down the population into subsamples for Q13, too. Significantly different results are obtained for native speakers of English and Slavic languages:*

| | English | | Slavic | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No | 207 | 96.73% | 57 | 65.52% |
| Yes, niche field | 4 | 1.87% | 17 | 19.54% |
| Yes, various fields | 2 | 0.93% | 13 | 14.94% |
| Yes, all fields | 1 | 0.47% | 0 | 0.00% |
| Total | 214 | | 87 | |

**English**
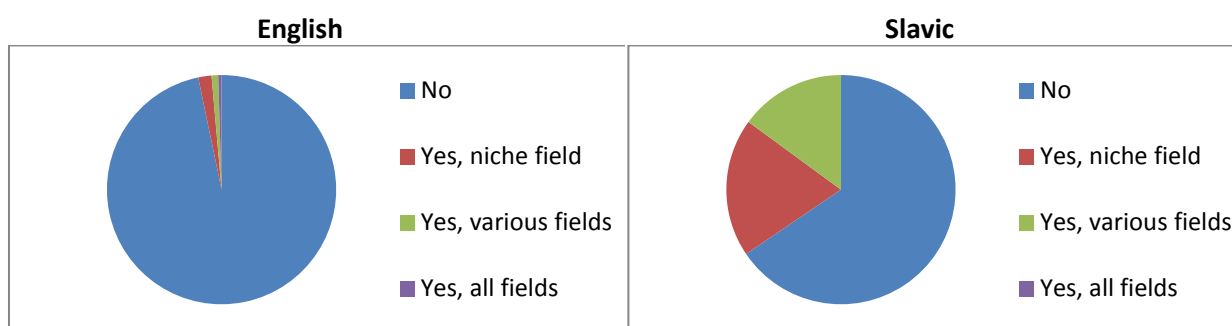
**Slavic**



**Observation:** *The relatively high willingness among native speakers of Slavic languages to translate between two non-native languages may be due to similarity of source language (L3) to their native language, e.g., in ex-Yugoslavia, as confirmed by comments for Q10 and Q14. Based on the open-ended answers, the target language is dominantly English.*

**Sample comments**

*It is borderline unethical for a translator translate \*into\* an L2 (see definitions) with exceedingly rare exceptions. For some language combinations, crazy things like this do sometimes "have" to happen: say you need a translation from Polish into Hindi, but you only have a translator who does Czech into Hindi. If that translator has some familiarity with Polish and good dictionaries, that might be the best option for a given translation project from and to a rare combination.*

If that's what the client needs... but only if I'm very comfortable with the field and there is no hurried deadline. And, of course, I always get it checked by professional native speakers for quality assurance.

*I was asked by a German software company to translate their release notes from DE-de to EN-uk and they were very happy with the results (reviewed and proofed by their office in UK); after that they let me translate the release notes of every new software version.*

I have done it once in a large project and my client was very happy with the results (Japanese into English)

*I do it occasionally for NGOs*

Serbian, Croatian (used to be one language, Serbo-Croatian) into English. Serbo-Croatian was the official language of Yugoslavia in which I was born, raised and educated.

*Q15. What volume of your work comes from translation from your native language into a non-native language (L1->L2)?*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 0% | 285 | 37.60% |
| 0-1% | 55 | 7.26% |
| 1-2% | 33 | 4.35% |
| 2-5% | 32 | 4.22% |
| 5-10% | 55 | 7.26% |
| 10-20% | 53 | 6.99% |
| 20-50% | 121 | 15.96% |
| 50-99% | 110 | 14.51% |
| 100% | 14 | 1.85% |
| Sample size | 758 | |
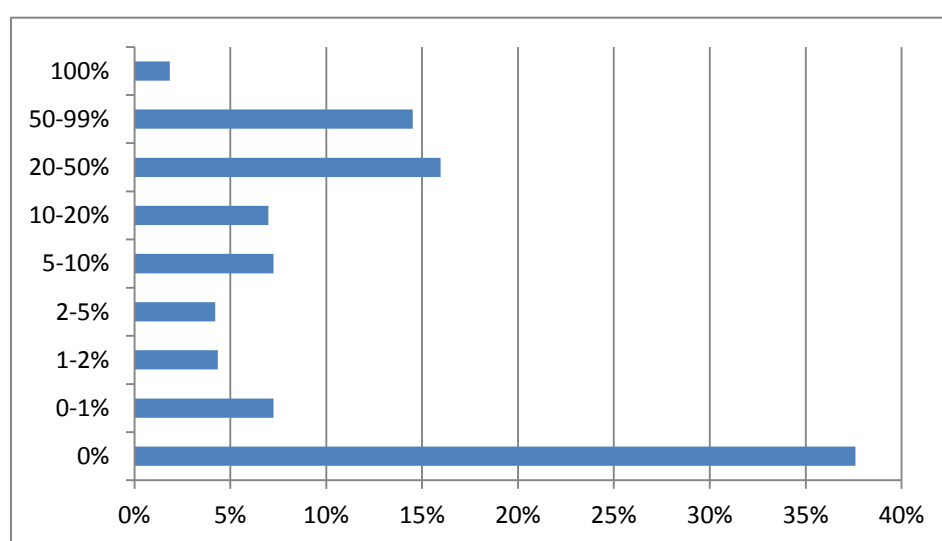


**Observation:** *Using mid-interval values (0%, 0.5%, 1.5%, 3.5% etc.), a weighted average of 20.16% is obtained (0%\*37.6% + 0.5%\*7.26% + 1.5%\*4.35%+…). While this figure cannot be considered precise, it gives a useful order-of-magnitude estimate: roughly 20% of the work of the surveyed translator population comes from L1->L2 translations. The weighted average provides an easy way to compare how this relative volume varies across different native languages.*

| | English | | Scandinavian | | PFIGS | | Dutch | | Slavic | | Hungarian | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **0%** | 153 | 71.50% | 14 | 43.75% | 80 | 29.41% | 11 | 31.43% | 9 | 10.59% | 2 | 5.71% |
| **0-1%** | 18 | 8.41% | 7 | 21.88% | 18 | 6.62% | 2 | 5.71% | 5 | 5.88% | 0 | 0.00% |
| **1-2%** | 7 | 3.27% | 4 | 12.50% | 10 | 3.68% | 2 | 5.71% | 3 | 3.53% | 3 | 8.57% |
| **2-5%** | 5 | 2.34% | 1 | 3.13% | 13 | 4.78% | 3 | 8.57% | 4 | 4.71% | 3 | 8.57% |
| **5-10%** | 6 | 2.80% | 1 | 3.13% | 24 | 8.82% | 3 | 8.57% | 10 | 11.76% | 3 | 8.57% |
| **10-20%** | 3 | 1.40% | 1 | 3.13% | 27 | 9.93% | 4 | 11.43% | 10 | 11.76% | 3 | 8.57% |
| **20-50%** | 6 | 2.80% | 3 | 9.38% | 54 | 19.85% | 3 | 8.57% | 24 | 28.24% | 7 | 20.00% |
| **50-99%** | 10 | 4.67% | 1 | 3.13% | 42 | 15.44% | 7 | 20.00% | 19 | 22.35% | 13 | 37.14% |
| **100%** | 6 | 2.80% | 0 | 0.00% | 4 | 1.47% | 0 | 0.00% | 1 | 1.18% | 1 | 2.86% |
| **Subsample size** | 214 | | 32 | | 272 | | 35 | | 85 | | 35 | |
| **Weighted average** | | 7.88% | | 6.73% | | 22.41% | | 20.77% | | 30.72% | | 40.07% |
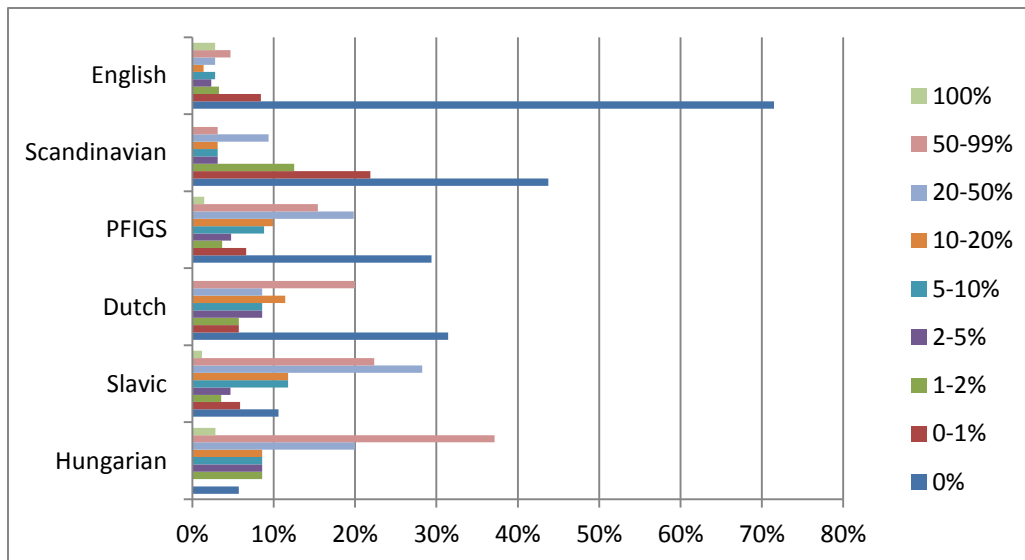
While the status of PFIGS languages in the translation and localization industry may justify treating them as a group, individual features such as legislation, education, market pressure, etc. may lead to rather significant differences. This is confirmed by the survey results:

| | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **0%** | 43.24% | 10.94% | 36.11% | 40% | 22.81% |
| **0-1%** | 8.11% | 6.25% | 2.78% | 8.89% | 8.77% |
| **1-2%** | 5.41% | 4.69% | 0% | 4.44% | 3.51% |
| **2-5%** | 8.11% | 3.13% | 4.17% | 4.44% | 5.26% |
| **5-10%** | 8.11% | 12.50% | 4.17% | 11.11% | 10.53% |
| **10-20%** | 13.51% | 12.50% | 11.11% | 11.11% | 3.51% |
| **20-50%** | 13.51% | 18.75% | 20.83% | 11.11% | 31.58% |
| **50-99%** | 0.00% | 29.69% | 18.06% | 6.67% | 14.04% |
| **100%** | 0.00% | 1.56% | 2.78% | 2.20% | 0.00% |
| **Subsample size** | 37 | 64 | 72 | 45 | 57 |
| **Weighted average** | 7.77% | 33.41% | 25.75% | 13.86% | 23.18% |

Weighted averages:
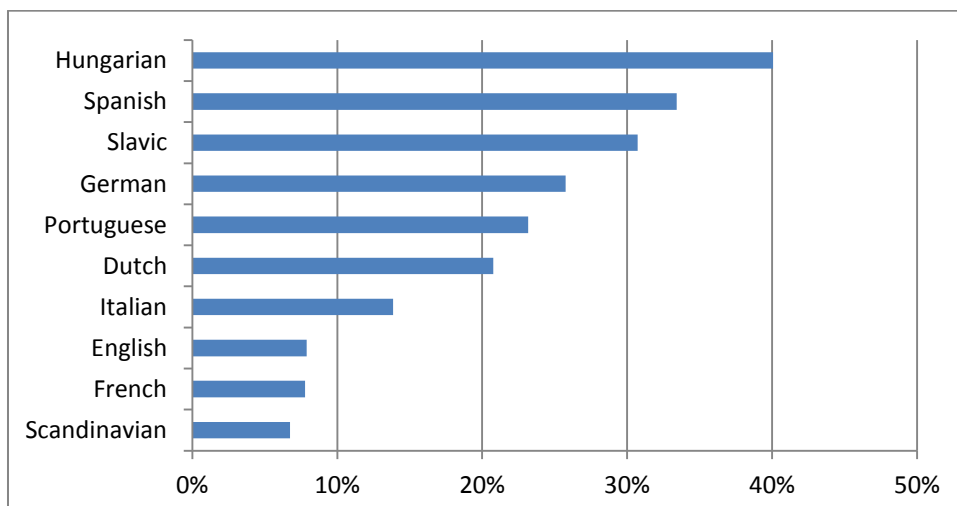
On average, translators whose native language is Scandinavian will receive about 7% of their translation volume in an L1->L2 language pair. The corresponding percentage is much higher (40%) for translators whose native language is Hungarian.

What other factors may influence this percentage? We checked the certification status for native speakers of English and of PFIGS languages collectively. (Splitting the PFIGS group would have yielded statistically insignificant subsamples).

| | Overall | Certified | English | Cert., Eng | PFIGS | Cert., PFIGS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **0%** | 37.60% | 48.73% | 71.50% | 80.33% | 29.41% | 32.31% |
| **0-1%** | 7.26% | 5.70% | 8.41% | 4.92% | 6.62% | 6.15% |
| **1-2%** | 4.35% | 6.96% | 3.27% | 1.64% | 3.68% | 10.77% |
| **2-5%** | 4.22% | 5.06% | 2.34% | 4.92% | 4.78% | 6.15% |
| **5-10%** | 7.26% | 3.80% | 2.80% | 0.00% | 8.82% | 6.15% |
| **10-20%** | 6.99% | 6.33% | 1.40% | 0.00% | 9.93% | 7.69% |
| **20-50%** | 15.96% | 8.86% | 2.80% | 0.00% | 19.85% | 12.31% |
| **50-99%** | 14.51% | 12.03% | 4.67% | 4.92% | 15.44% | 15.38% |
| **100%** | 1.85% | 2.53% | 2.80% | 3.28% | 1.47% | 3.08% |
| **Subsample size** | 758 | 158 | 214 | 61 | 272 | 65 |
| **Weighted average** | 20.16% | 16.20% | 7.88% | 7.19% | 22.41% | 20.95% |
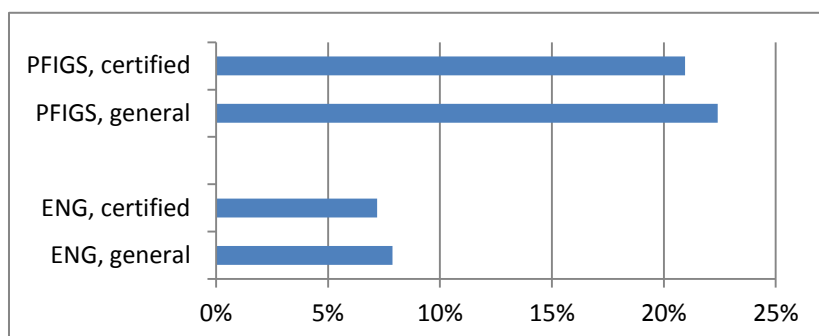


**Observation:** *Translation into one's native language is slightly more dominant among certified translators than in the entire sample.*

**Sample comments**

*Again, fresh out of school I did not want to work into a non native language, but the market kept asking for that. Quite frankly, what convinced me was seeing that I was able to do a much better job than the people who were accepting the jobs I had refused. Also, having had the opportunity of completing a TESL program in Canada, I realized that my writing skills are in no way behind those of many educated native English speakers. So, who is to say I am not qualified to translate into English?*

Dictated by demand rather than supply.

*I have found that it takes longer and is therefore less cost-efficient for the client, since I charge by the hour. I used to subcontract into-German work occasionally but now I usually just refer the client rather than act as an intermediary. And I still translate into German if familiarity with the larger client project would be an advantage.*

In Belarus the percentage is higher as it's a normal practice for translators to translate from native into a non-native language. The % indicated is chosen according to my current situation, thought the percentage was much higher when I lived and worked in Belarus.

*Usually, I translate from Hungarian into Bulgarian 2 pages (1500 characters without spaces) per hour and from Bulgarian into Hungarian 1 page per hour. Translating from Bulgarian into Hungarian I need to check not only terms but collocations too. I translate from Bulgarian into Hungarian mostly for Bulgarian translating agencies. I interpret consecutively and simultaneously Hungarian-Bulgarian-Hungarian.*

*Q16. What volume of your work comes from translation from a non-native language into another non-native language (L3->L2)?*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **0%** | 569 | 78.48% |
| **0-1%** | 32 | 4.41% |
| **1-2%** | 27 | 3.72% |
| **2-5%** | 21 | 2.90% |
| **5-10%** | 23 | 3.17% |
| **10-20%** | 17 | 2.34% |
| **20-50%** | 22 | 3.03% |
| **50-99%** | 12 | 1.66% |
| **100%** | 2 | 0.28% |
| **Sample size** | 725 | |
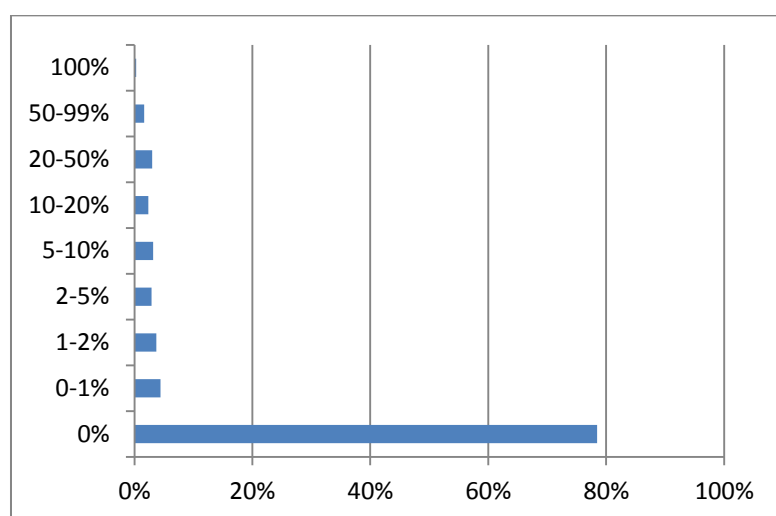


**Observation:** *Using the same mid-interval values as in the previous question (0%, 0.5%, 1.5%, 3.5% etc.), a weighted average of 3.35% is obtained (0%\*78.48% + 0.5%\*4.41% + 1.5%\*3.72%+…). This tells us that L3->L2 translation volume is about one-sixth of the L1->L2 figure. Both numbers show huge variations across languages.*

| | Slavic | PFIGS | English |
|---|---|---|---|
| **0%** | 52.63% | 81.30% | 96.62% |
| **0-1%** | 6.58% | 3.44% | 1.45% |
| **1-2%** | 5.26% | 3.82% | 0.48% |
| **2-5%** | 2.63% | 2.29% | 0.48% |
| **5-10%** | 10.53% | 3.05% | 0.00% |
| **10-20%** | 6.58% | 2.67% | 0.48% |
| **20-50%** | 7.89% | 2.67% | 0.48% |
| **50-99%** | 6.58% | 0.76% | 0.00% |
| **100%** | 1.32% | 0.00% | 0.00% |
| **Subsample size** | 76 | 262 | 207 |
| **Weighted average** | 10.99% | 2.29% | 0.27% |
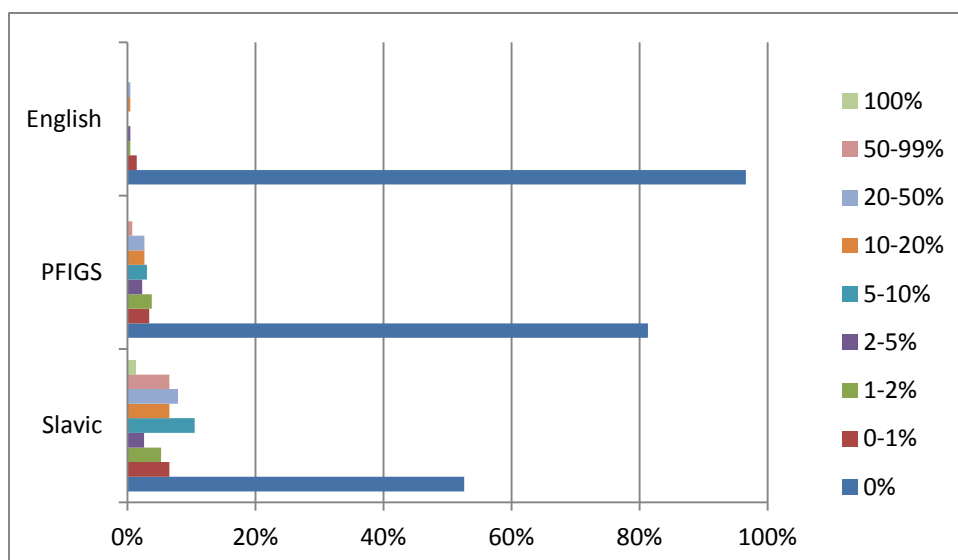
**Observation:** *Among native speakers of Slavic languages, L3->L2 translations represent a significant percentage of their work (11%). In many cases, L2 is English, and L3 is linguistically close to L1. Among native English speakers this practice is very rare.*

**Comments**

*69%*

[Native language: Dutch, country of origin: Dutch part of Belgium, country of residence: Germany] I'd say about 30-40% of our work is from FR and GE. It goes up and down, though, and it depends on the client too.

*Once a year or so somebody wants a Latin translation longer than a catchy one-liner.*

Only with tools and dictionary

*Q17. Is it common in your main language pair or in the reverse language pair that translators work from their native language into a non-native language (L1->L2)?*

| | In main language pair | | In reverse language pair | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Very common** | 210 | 29.45% | 142 | 22.76% |
| **Fairly common** | 240 | 33.66% | 186 | 29.81% |
| **Rare** | 163 | 22.86% | 178 | 28.53% |
| **Very rare** | 100 | 14.03% | 118 | 18.91% |
| **Total** | 713 | | 624 | |
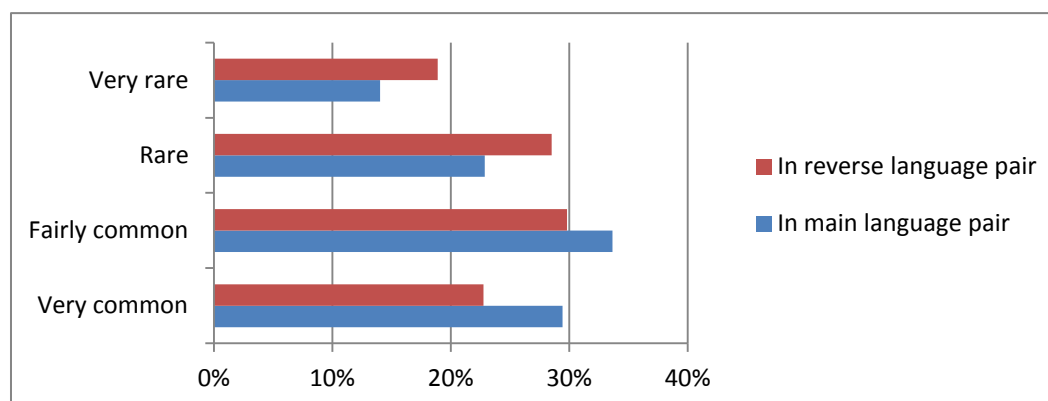


Breakdown by respondents' native languages (into = in main pair; from = in reverse pair)

| | English | | PFIGS | | Scandinavian | | Slavic | | Dutch | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Into** | **From** | **Into** | **From** | **Into** | **From** | **Into** | **From** | **Into** | **From** |
| Very common (3) | 24.51% | 16.86% | 26.48% | 17.70% | 10.71% | 4.17% | 37.80% | 39.19% | 17.65% | 20.59% |
| Fairly common (2) | 37.25% | 19.77% | 35.97% | 38.94% | 10.71% | 29.17% | 30.49% | 32.43% | 29.41% | 23.53% |
| Rare (1) | 21.08% | 34.30% | 25.69% | 29.65% | 57.14% | 33.33% | 15.85% | 14.86% | 32.35% | 41.18% |
| Very rare (0) | 17.16% | 29.07% | 11.86% | 13.72% | 21.43% | 33.33% | 15.85% | 13.51% | 20.59% | 14.71% |
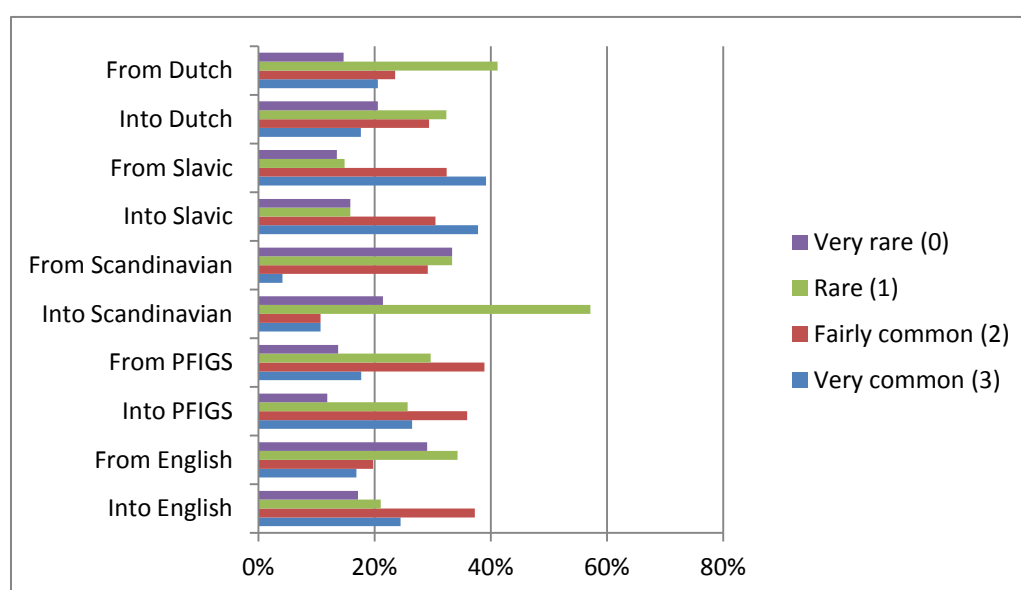


Using the weights (3, 2, 1, 0) shown in the above table, we obtain the following weighted averages:

| | English | | PFIGS | | Scandinavian | | Slavic | | Dutch | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Into | From | Into | From | Into | From | Into | From | Into | From |
| **Weighted average** | 1.69 | 1.24 | 1.77 | 1.61 | 1.11 | 1.04 | 1.90 | 1.97 | 1.44 | 1.50 |
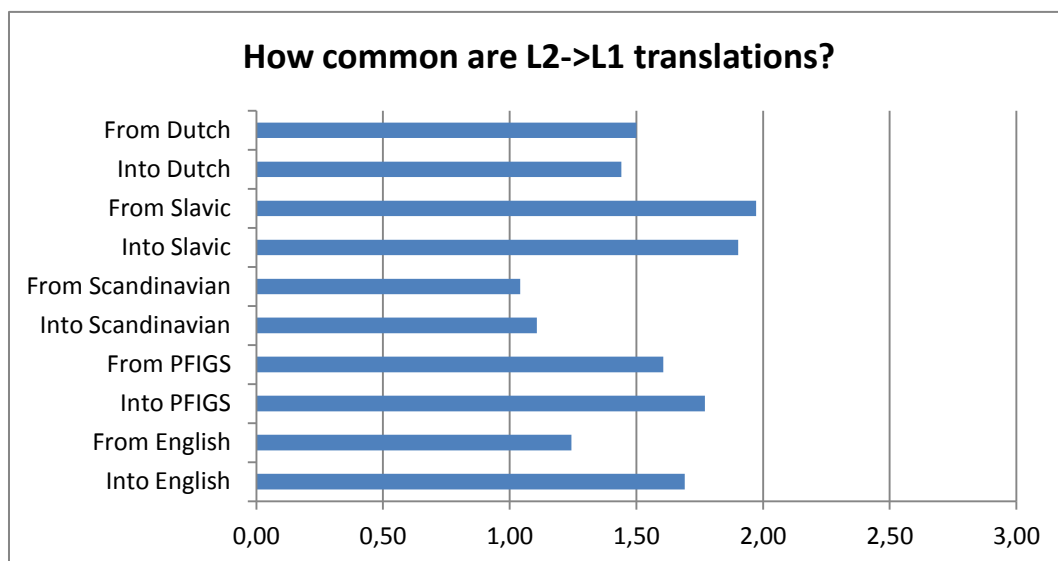


**Observation:** *This question sought feedback on how translators perceive peer practice. Among the Scandinavian group, it is considered unusual to translate into the non-native language, whereas the practice is quite common among the Slavic language speakers.*

*Most of the comments revolved about translation into English – in line with previous comments, which showed that English was by far the most common target language for non-native speakers. Unsurprisingly, a good part of these comments are from native speakers of English – and are negative.*

**Sample comments**

*Innumerable Brazilians, native Portuguese speakers, claim to be able to translate into English, their non-native language. The results are usually atrocious. The clients don't know how awful the translation is. Brazilians have one of the poorest rates of familiarity with English in the world (according to a recent study, I don't remember where it was published). I know only one colleague, a linguistically-gifted Brazilian living in the U.S. and certified by the ATA to translate in either direction, who has the translating skills to do so with excellent results; however, details in her translations into English give away the fact that it is not her native language, so I edit her work.*

*In Brazil, standards are very low. Clients do not usually care if a translator is native or not in the target language.*

*[German > English] Many idiotic Germans feel they are capable of translating into English. They are usually wrong but do it anyway, and the results are usually catastrophic. However, if their clients are German they usually don't know any better, and the more ignorant sausage-suckers actually prefer the L2 bilge. They are welcome to it, because this helps them to stand out on the market as what they are: idiots :-)*

Define "common" please. For example, I am aware of many translators who *claim* to be able to translate from language X into (non-native) English and do so – a standard profile on commercial sites such as Proz, for example. Yet examples of their work show that they are squarely positioned in segments that are generally not too demanding on style or flow. Which is no big deal as there is room for everybody out there, right? (And note that many into-native translators on such sites aren't all that hot either, based on the examples they post.) I think that the "best practice" guidelines are something else, however. I really do think that clients must be informed of this.

*Thinking about it, actually, I know that it is done in the low end of the market, but those practices are being replaced by the use of machine translation which is probably equally (un)satisfactory but cheaper.*

I speak for Spanish to English. It continues to be a requirement for sworn translators EN->ES to work the reverse. Some outsource and others ask for editing. A few may go ahead and translate on their own, but I only hear about it and am not directly aware (no first-hand evidence). This is main language pair by volume. If talking about EN<->TL, I am quite sure a lot of professionals work both ways, with satisfactory results. Bilingualism is almost a rule among TL speakers in the sense that you can't finish studies without it.

*[English-Japanese(native)] I have heard from a major translation agent that they know that translating into native language is the global standard, but they think Japanese as difficult to read language, and they let Japanese native translators do Japanese > English translation for avoiding miss comprehension by non native Japanese translator.*

A lot of people who are native speakers of Spanish translate into English. However, you can always tell when a translation is done by a non-native speaker. They miss nuance and connotation, make errors in word choice or collocation, mis-use prepositions, etc. The translation is full of "of the of the of the" and gerunds are nowhere to be found.

*[only pair: FR>EN] I guess it's fairly common for English native speakers to translate out of English as well as into it, if they've lived abroad for a long time. But it's extremely common for the reverse to be true, whatever the standard of English :(.*

In Japan the majority of Japanese to English translation appears to be done by native Japanese speakers, but I'm not aware of many native English speakers translating into Japanese.

*From Spanish into English, mainly. In the market I work in, clients don't care too much whether the translator is or is not a native speaker (besides, being a native speaker doesn't guarantee that you are a good translator). My translations into English, in my subject field, have been praised even by native speakers. I expect to reach the same level of quality when I start translating into Portuguese.*

[Czech-French] It is very common for Czech translators to translate into French, but I cannot really imagine French translators translating into Czech. This is mainly due to the custom in our respective markets.

*There are MANY Italians who—having felt the recession in their country—translate into (abysmal!) English because they need the money and, having spent 6 months in London, think they're an expert. It's practically an epidemic.*

As not many native speakers of Dutch are present in Serbia, people who need translations into Dutch, cannot chose and translators are more or less sometimes being pushed to do translation into their non-native language.

*[Dutch-English] Most Dutch people think their English is native level. I beg to differ. I believe that the NL-EN market is more lucrative, hence the number of native Dutch speakers who work in that market rather than concentrating on what they do best – EN-NL.*

[Dutch to English] I am told that official translator training programs in the Netherlands teach native-Dutch students that they can translate just fine in both directions. I see this as part of the general Dutch culture of linguistic arrogance; many Dutch people overestimate their foreign language skills.

*Europeans especially often overestimate their skills in English, so it's fairly common for nonnative speakers of English to translate into English. This is the source of a lot of the weird, humorous, or silly translations we see in the English-speaking world. Fun fact: Some European translation certification programs require translators to translate in both directions (e.g., Norway used to). This is old-fashioned in the age of the Internet, where an English translator is an e-mail away—it's a relic from a time when telecommunications were hard.*

Germany offers qualifications which apparently allow people to translate both ways; however, it has always been the norm in the UK, at least since I have been active as a translator, to translate into one's mother tongue only. This does put the UK translator at a slight competitive disadvantage in the European job market, but it is done in order to ensure the appropriate quality of output is achieved and maintained.

*I am not sure how common it really is. However, the French system does seem to expect translators and interpreters to work in both directions, particularly in work for the courts. I do come across a lot of people (mainly on ProZ.com) who make false claims about native level linguistic ability. There is also a problem with translators from countries that use English as a lingua franca but often in a very localised form (e.g. India), but where the English generally current would not be acceptable for professional use in countries where English is the native language. Many of those translators claim to be "native" in English.*

In Argentina, at least, it is very common. In most universities, you are taught how and required to translate into and from your mother tongue. I've heard it is not common abroad (or even considered proper), but I've been trained this way, I've been working for several years know, and the law requires that all documents in English be translated into Spanish by an Argentine translator (or, more specifically, one graduated from a university in Argentina). So it feels quite natural to me.

*[Main pair: EN>NL. Reverse: NL>EN.] Speaking of both EN>GE and EN>NL, both groups of translators tend to work into their non-native language **because the ministry demands it** if you wish to be certified as a translator. Certified translations also have to be made by sworn translators, unlike in the Anglosaxon countries.*

[German-Norwegian] I think it's rare or very rare for professional translators. But I think it's quite common among amateurs that call themselves "translator"

*All Germans are born thinking they can translate into English :)*

[German-English] There is a lot of demand for translations from German into English, which is why it is very common for German native translators to work into English.

*... it is very common in the US for untrained heritage speakers to translate into Spanish and/or English when they don't really have "native speaker" status in either language.*

I do a lot of editing and see a lot of Germans and Swedes translating into English. I only know of one native German speaker that's decent at translating into English and one dual native Swedish/Finnish speaker that's decent at translating into English. The rest severely overestimate their abilities.

*In the Swedish>English and Finnish>English combinations, the demand far outstrips supply so many native SV and FI speakers translate into English.*

It is not uncommon at all to see Chinese>English translations carried out by native speakers of Chinese. These are almost always done poorly. I am frequently approached to proofread such translations and usually refuse. Translation into a non-native target language is against the best practice of the industry and against the code of ethics of NAATI (the issue of competence), by which I endeavour to abide.

*Chinese-English translation is dominated by native Chinese speakers, who often translate in both directions.*

It is very common for Czechs to translate into English but English native speakers do not translate into Czech **as the language is too difficult to grasp perfectly**.

*Translators from Arabic into English who are native or near-native English speakers are rare, so you get a huge number of non-native speakers translating Ara>Eng. On the other hand, Arabic is hellishly difficult to master, and I don't know anyone who is a non-native Arabic language speaker who translates into Arabic.*

Unfortunately, in Bulgaria it is common that Bulgarians translate into English, Spanish, etc., even though they are not native in these languages. Yet, there are not many foreigners fluent in Bulgarian – **it is one of the most difficult languages**...

*Hungarian being a non-Indo-European language the grammar is particularly difficult to master. Even those with excellent spoken Hungarian would make many mistakes in writing.*

Common for non-natives to translate from Polish to English.

*Very common for Greek translators to translate into EN*

Many native speakers of Russian do translate into English on a regular basis (with various degrees of success). Very, very few speakers of English translate into Russian.

*In Macedonia translators are expected to be able to translate into their non-native language(s). This puts pressure on the translators to attempt to translate in their non-native languages. Also, Macedonian clients are not picky and do not complain about "bad English/French/German" or whatever the foreign language may be. In addition, this combination (MK>foreign language) lacks sufficient and appropriate supply of native speakers.*

My main language pair is Estonian-English, and it is fairly common that Estonians translate into English. Actually, I do not know any native English speakers doing translations into Estonian.

*My main language pair is German -> English. I find it fairly common that native German translators work from German into English, particularly in the area of contracts and similar legal texts, where an absolutely accurate understanding of bulky sentences is critical and the emphasis is not on "sounding nice." I find it much rarer that texts are translated into German from English native speakers.*

My main pair is Russian>English. I know of no other English native speaker who translates into Russian. On the other hand, most native Russian translators have been trained to believe that they can translate into English as well as a native speaker can, but it is always blatantly obvious to a native English speaker that the translation was done by a non-native speaker and not proofed by a native speaker.

*Working into one's non-native language is very rare in the UK, because it is not considered by ITI or the CIoL that one should claim to do this, or that one can reach the same standard as in one's own language. Translator associations in other countries do not necessarily recognise this, and many of their translators translate, for instance, into English, sometimes with unacceptable results.*

[Spanish-Polish] It's fairly common that in my reverse language pair (Polish-Spanish) that translators work from Polish to Spanish, because there is a shortage of Spanish native translators with excellent command in Polish. Therefore, the demand in this pair has to be covered by Polish native translators with excellent domain of Spanish.

*With the crisis in Spain, many people have reinvented themselves as translators from Spanish/Catalan/Basque/Gallego into English with the consequent worsening of quality! This is applicable here both for written translation and interpreting.*

It is REALLY hard for me to discuss this without getting VERY angry about the intrusion of native Spanish speakers who translate into English on a regular basis. The USA is particularly bad in this sense.

*Q18. Is it common in your main language pair or in the reverse language pair that translators work between two non-native languages (L3->L2)?*

| | In main language pair | | In reverse language pair | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Very common** | 19 | 2.94% | 14 | 2.42% |
| **Fairly common** | 77 | 11.92% | 66 | 11.42% |
| **Rare** | 248 | 38.39% | 210 | 36.33% |
| **Very rare** | 302 | 46.75% | 288 | 49.83% |
| **Total** | 646 | | 578 | |
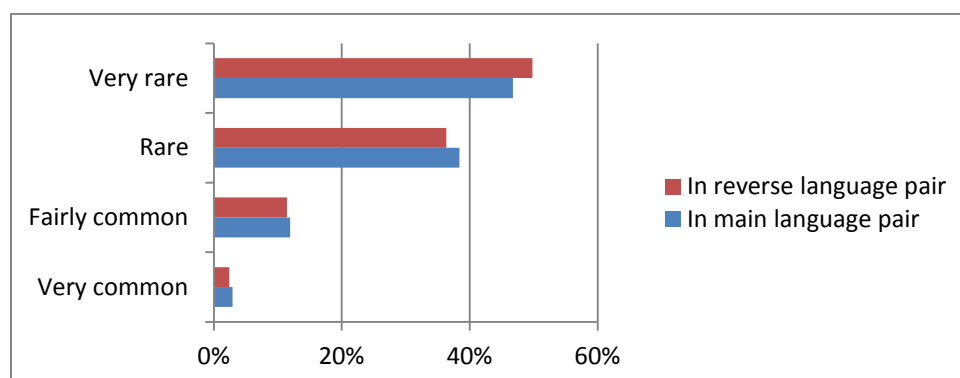


Among those whose native language is English:

| | Into English | | From English | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Very common** | 3 | 1.71% | 4 | 2.61% |
| **Fairly common** | 21 | 12.00% | 17 | 11.11% |
| **Rare** | 73 | 41.71% | 60 | 39.22% |
| **Very rare** | 78 | 44.57% | 72 | 47.06% |
| **Total** | 175 | | 153 | |

**Observation:** *Several respondents admitted that their answer was just an educated guess. Calculating a weighted average along the same lines as in Q17, we obtain 0.71 is for into English and 0.69 from English. Both figures correspond to "rare/very rare", and are considerably lower than for L1->L2 translations (1.69; 1.24). The weighted averages calculated in Q17 and Q18 show how the respondents of the survey perceive L1->L2 and L3->L2 translations in their main language pair and its reverse. The figures calculated in Q15 and Q16 are based on the respondents' own practice. The perceived difference between L1->L2 and L3->L2 appears compatible with the difference in reported practice (L3->L2 translations representing about 1/6 of the volume of L1->L2 translations).*

**Comments**

*My guestimate only....*

Again, fairly common for translators working (often struggling) at the lower rungs of the market. In premium, specialized markets, you generally discredit yourself if you go around claiming to work into a non-native language.

*Again, very rare among certified (actually certified, not proz certified) translators.*

*Q19. If you translate into a non-native language, do you arrange proof-reading before submitting your translation?*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes, always | 166 | 28.52% | 39.15% |
| Yes, unless the client insist that they will | 97 | 16.67% | 22.88% |
| No, the client does | 99 | 17.01% | 23.35% |
| No, there is no proof-reading involved | 62 | 10.65% | 14.62% |
| Other | 158 | 27.15% | |
| Total | 582 | 100% | 100% |
| Subtotal (without "Other") | 424 | | |

The percentages of the last column are calculated for those who gave a "Yes" or a "No" answer. (Those who chose "Other" are omitted here.)
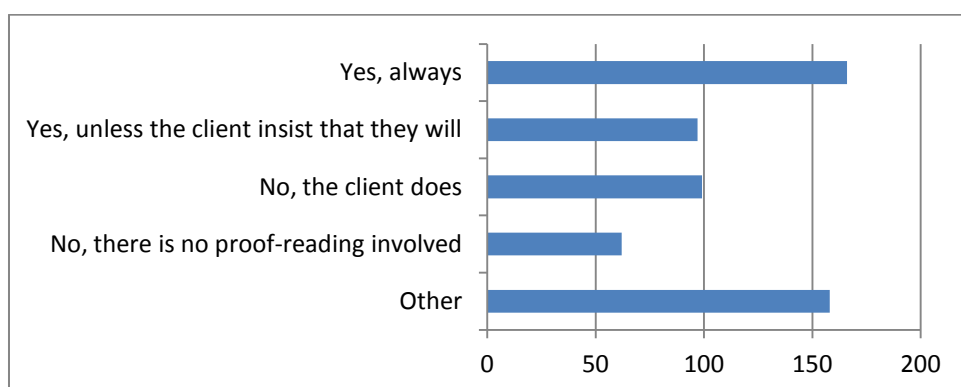


Do these figures depend on experience or certification status? In addition to these two subsamples, a third one was also taken: those who added their names to their comments at the end of the current survey. (The rationale behind taking such a subsample becomes clear in Q33.) Ignoring the "Other" answer option again, the following percentages are obtained:

| | General | 15+ years | Certified | Signed comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yes, always | 39.15% | 44.81% | 42.86% | 45.26% |
| Yes, unless the client insist that they will | 22.88% | 15.58% | 28.57% | 25.26% |
| No, the client does | 23.35% | 23.38% | 20.00% | 18.95% |
| No, there is no proof-reading involved | 14.62% | 16.23% | 8.57% | 10.53% |
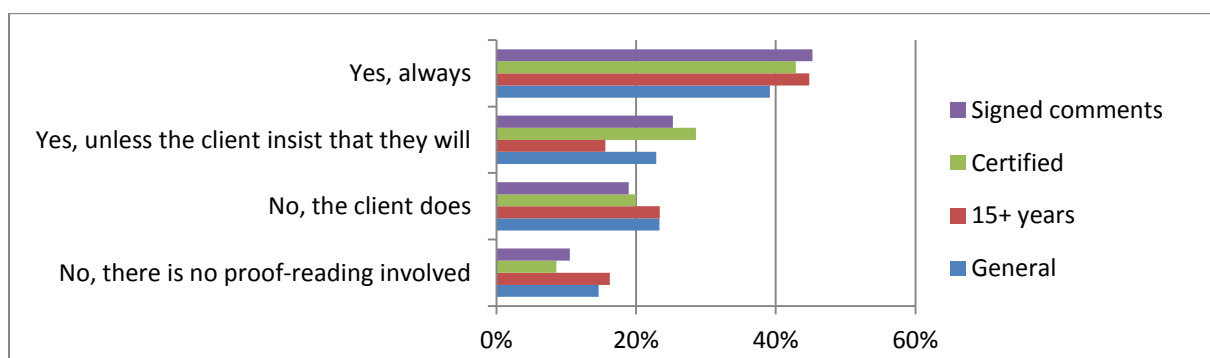


**Observation:** *Unproofed translation into a non-native language is considerably rarer among certified translators than among non-certified ones.*

**Comments**

*Agencies mainly, they do the proofreading, and I make sure that they know beforehand about the direction of my Accreditation.*

Also: Yes, unless the client considers it utterly unnecessary and will not pay for it. Depends on the kind of text and its purpose...

*[Yes, always] by a native, but not a translator*

Depends on if the client wishes to pay for the proofreading and if the text really requires proofreading (it's not the same to translate a birth certificate than a patent).

*Depends on project. If it is a boiler-plate kind of translation, I don't send out for proofing. If it is very simple, I don't send out for proofing. If it is a new subject and challenging, I always send out for editing and proofing.*

Direct client – sometimes (depends on fees they are prepared to pay) Agency – no, as fees too low to allow for this extra service

*I do my own proof-reading.*

I ask my clients to do it, but do not know if they actually do. Ideally they should also proofread when I translate into French, as I work for direct clients and may not be familiar with all their jargon.

*I do it myself*

I have the luxury of having an English husband.

*I mostly do text for tattoos into Latin. If there is a larger job, I have used a proofreader on occasion.*

I used to but now only in rare cases (ever since my editor said to me "you don't need me any more for the day to day stuff").

*If I work for direct solicitor clients, there is no proof reading involved – they are not really bothered about native speakers. If I work for agencies, they proof read (or so I hope).*

It depends on the deadlines and how much I get from the client in order to pay for a native.

*Q20. When you translate into a non-native language, how often do you get feedback?*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Always | 60 | 11.24% |
| Often | 71 | 13.30% |
| Sometimes | 139 | 26.03% |
| Rarely | 166 | 31.09% |
| Never | 98 | 18.35% |
| Total | 534 | |

Focusing on the first two subsamples used in the previous question – respondents with 15+ years of experience and respondents certified by a translator association – we find:

| | General | 15+ years | Certified |
|---|---|---|---|
| Always | 11.24% | 11.00% | 11.83% |
| Often | 13.30% | 14.00% | 13.98% |
| Sometimes | 26.03% | 25.00% | 22.58% |
| Rarely | 31.09% | 27.50% | 29.03% |
| Never | 18.35% | 22.50% | 22.58% |
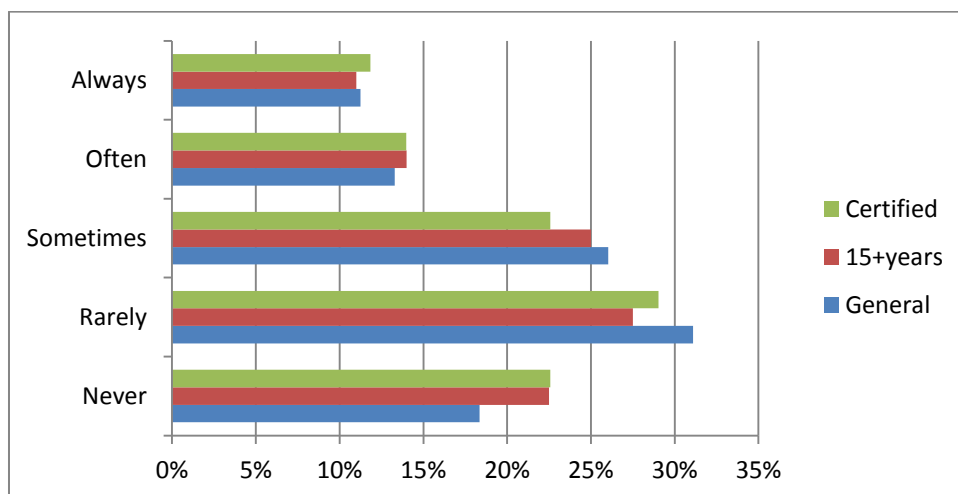


**Observation:** *There are only minor differences between the three populations. In the comments the great majority reported consistently positive feedback, if any. This is at great odds with what the same population reported as their own experience in the opposite case, namely when they proof-read non-native translations. One potential interpretation is that the sample is self-selecting: continued offers of work into L2 potentially indicate translator competence and client satisfaction, with or without explicit feedback. There may also be reluctance on the part of clients or project managers to send negative feedback to translators in order to avoid conflicts. Either way, only filtered feedback reaches translators, leading to a bias.*

**Sample comments**

*As a freelance I always have to ask for feedback to get it. Sometimes it is just not convenient. However, I try to get it when I can. As an in-house translator in a bilingual environment, my translations would very often come back to me with comments about language and terminology. This*

*was invaluable for me and helped me become a good translator into my non-native language, into the areas in which the office worked.*

"You seem better at it than a native!" ;-)

*Apparently, only when the client is not happy. Happy clients do not take the time to feedback; they just come back.*

As long as my work is understandable, it is sufficient.

*Feedback in general is rare, whether that is for a translation into my native language or into my non-native language. If I do get feedback, it is always positive.*

Feedback is always sought for reasons of examining customer satisfaction and securing customer retention.

*Has always been positive*

I do get positive feedback, but it's surely because I always have a native speaker proofread before sending the translation to the end client.

*I have approximately 10 to 12 regular customers. Four of them use to send me jobs on a very regular basis, one of them sends me EN>PT jobs every week and sometimes 2-3 jobs (EN>PT) per week. This is my favourite kind of feedback.*

I have gotten positive feedback about letters of my own that I have composed in German (not for clients), but I always wonder how much is just flattery, or whether the recipients are so used to seeing bad German coming from the US that anything fairly good stands out even if not perfect.

*Silence being taken for satisfaction.*

The feedback I get is very favorable.

*The feedback is always good or very good because, as I said before, my non-native language level is at a mother tongue level.*

Not sure what do you mean by feedback. 99% of my work is for direct clients from target language speaking country. The feedback which I value is that they come back to me every time. If you mean linguistic feedback – no, I typically don't get it.

*Very rarely. And the quality is not always that great, e.g. there are proofreaders who are just wrong. This includes native speakers.*

*Q21. Is this more often or less often than for translations into your native language?*

| More often | 20 |
|---|---|
| About the same | 93 |
| Less often | 40 |
| N/A | 69 |
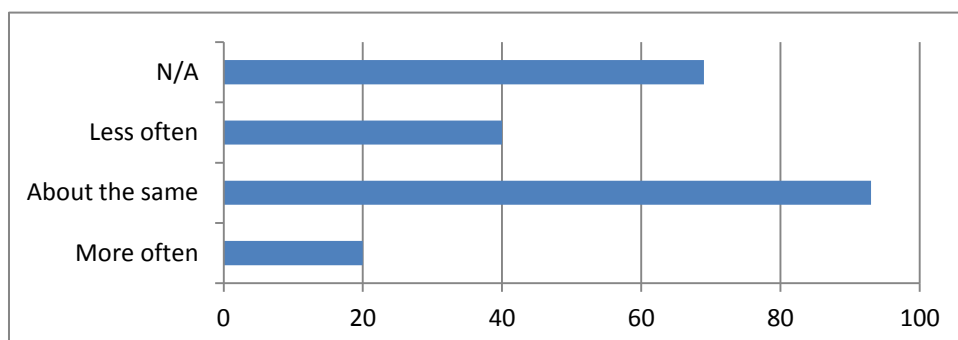


**Observation:** *Overall, it is slightly less often than for translations into a native language. This lack of proper feedback can easily lead to the overestimation of non-natives' translation skills mentioned in earlier comments.*

**Sample comments**

*I never get feedback. I did get two rejections: once because of work done too quickly (sloppy work, I lost the client), and another because of going into a field I can only guess at (IT). I learnt never to do those things again.*

Maybe even less often. However this may be because most clients are also users of native versions (and critical) but not users of non-native versions (and don't receive negative feedback from users), but it's also possible that non-native users find the translations acceptable, so we'll never know for sure.

*Actually most of my translation into L2 is sworn work. I remain liable for its accuracy, so no extrajudicial feedback is acceptable. Fortunately, I haven't had any judicial feedback.*

More often, because translations into my native language are normally published without proofreading by a third party (I am my own proofreader).

*More often only because there is more proofreading involved or I specifically ask for feedback.*

My customers rave about my translations into English and all but call me a goddess.

*My clients don't comment. They just come back and recommend other clients to me.*

Obviously most of my clients are native speakers of English like me and therefore in a better position to judge my command of English. I get frequent and consistently good feedback from my English-speaking clients. They would have no way to judge a translation into German.

*Q22. If you translate into a non-native language, what do you explain about this service on your website / in your other generic marketing resources?*

**Observation:** *This question and the next one were inspired by Daniel Šebesta's book,* Native Speaker Status in the Translation Services Market *(Lambert Academic Publishing, ISBN 978-3-659-42541-7).*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| I explain why this is usually not recommended | 24 | 10.53% |
| I explain why I am an exception to this general recommendation | 17 | 7.46% |
| I explain the advantages of working with a translator who is *not* a native speaker of the target language | 10 | 4.39% |
| I explain in some detail how I work into a non-native language | 22 | 9.65% |
| I mention the names of my partners who are native speakers of the target language | 11 | 4.82% |
| I show testimonials from clients for whom I worked into a non-native language | 27 | 11.84% |
| I do not add any particular comments about translation into a non-native language | 59 | 25.88% |
| I do not advertise such service on my website / in my marketing material | 57 | 25.00% |
| I do not translate into a non-native language | 59 | 25.88% |
| | | |
| Total | 228 | |
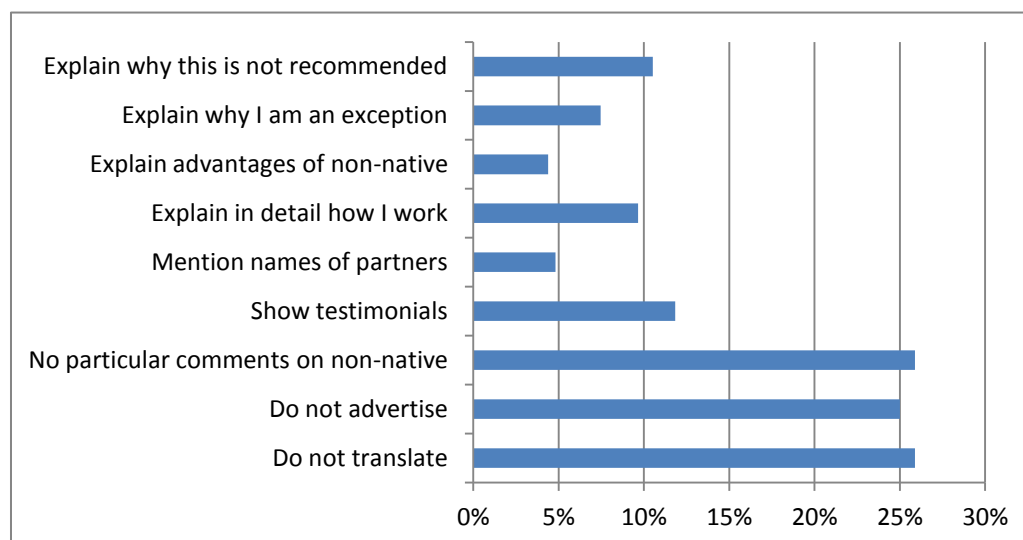


**Sample comments**

*I have yet to be asked by a client why I can translate in both directions. 30 years of translating, and the question has always been "Can you?" not "Why can you?"*

*I usually criticise the 'native speakers only' thing for want of sound basis and for oversimplification. What matters is the langue and the parole, not the passport, and focusing on native-speakership is a dangerous simplified heuristic bearing much semblance to magical thinking. Sort of like a taboo among the kind of natives who wear furs and throw spears, you know. Hand-in-hand with the undue weight given to native-speaker status walks the undue focus on domestication and pathological fear of exoticity. That latter is probably explained by an epidemic of softness in the knees and obsessive desire to avoid any chance of displeasing a client, requiring the reader to set his brains or imagination to work and so on. Also, modern linguistics fails to appreciate the importance of comprehension, resulting in crowds of natives of the target language with B2 certificates in source languages, thinking they can translate. Even C1 is not optimal. I believe it should be C2 for source.*

*I actually advertise why translating into my native language is the most professional behavior, and why I do NOT do the opposite.*

I always explain that I work in partnership with a native speaker translator for any translation into Spanish – I am the only professionally trained translator working in my area and I do as much client education as I can about the importance of a native speaker always doing the final editing. I have found advantages to our team process – as my partner is not US-based, when I edit his translations into Spanish that are targeting a US audience, I catch his context-based errors and he catches my language errors.

*In general, I work on a recommendation basis. My literary and political blogs are my public profile and clearly demonstrate my writing skills. I don't have a website. My translation work comes to me almost entirely via recommendation (clients who recommend me to others on the basis of their satisfaction with my work), so I do no real advertising.*

At least in Argentina, it is kind of taken for granted that you will be able to translate into English. In other words, direct clients and colleagues do not have an unfavorable opinion of translators who work into L2; actually, they usually seek them actively.

*Feedback from happy clients is the best way to convince people of your skills and to promote your business.*

[I] mention my 20 years of living and working in Canada since this is part of my work experience.

*I always let my clients know that no matter what language combination, the end work will be proofread by a native of the language in which the document was translated into.*

Actually, I have in the past deleted my offer of L3>L1 services, and left only the L3>L2 one, because I now work more readily, confidently and fast in that pair.

*I do enhance the fact that in some cases it is preferable to lose a bit of naturalness in the final text in exchange for a perfect understanding of the source text, something that in complex texts translated by people with poor knowledge of the source language and/or specialty can handicap the outcome, causing wrong messages. I also explain quite clearly that nativeness is not a "competence in language" category least is it a "competence in translation" category. Translation, at least in business and technical writing, is all about getting the right messages through and clearly, not pretty writing.*

I do not advertise this, but if a customer asks me to translate into my B language I say I can do this in cooperation with a native speaker of that language.

*I do not mention that I am not technically a native speaker because I do not consider myself to be less proficient than a native speaker and because I am professionally qualified in the language combination in which I practice, but always explain my situation in detail if anyone questions me.*

I don't translate into a non-native language but give those translations to my native partners (with the same fields of expertise) and proofread their translations regarding technical aspects. This concept is also described on my website.

*Whether or not a translator translates into a non-native language is entirely irrelevant, so why should I mention this on my website? Only the final product counts, no matter whether a native speaker, a non-native speaker or monkey did the translation.*

I explain my background (education and work experience + the fact that I live in my non-native country) and state my language pairs, but I do not say anything specific about why I offer the services I do (I do not feel a need to justify what I do). I am from a relatively small, remote country and translating into a non-native language is fairly common in my country simply because there are not enough native speakers of other languages who would know my native language well enough to translate from it. While I say that I offer translation services into my non-native language, I do not actively look for work in this pair.

*I explain to potential clients that there are some differences between a translation done by a native speaker and that of a non-native speaker – not on the website, but in emails discussing the job at hand. Then they can decide.*

All my qualifications are in my L2 and L3 languages. I passed all exams, with merits and distinctions. How can I not work in these languages?

*I mention my ATA certification, but I soft-pedal this service. I prefer to translate into my native language because it's more lucrative.*

As Hungarian is a small language with a limited number of non-Hungarian translators working from Hungarian into their respective native languages, it is required by Hungarian translators to offer such service.

*It is not always a bad thing. In legal translation, I think it's better if Czech texts are translated by Czechs as they are familiar with the legal environment and can explain a lot of things to the client.*

There are exceptions to the only-into-native rule. Mostly when the source language is not particularly accessible to people who haven't lived in that culture/country for decades. The advantages of working with a translator who is not a native of the target language actually means the advantages of working with a translator who IS a native of the trickier source language.

*Translating into a non-native language is very common here, as our own language is of limited profusion. There tends to be a divide between highly professional translators with an appropriate degree and 'autodidact' translators – with the latter group offering translation into their native language at dumping prices.*

We explain we are husband and wife. There is a bit of history and working process in our CVs (which I explained above). We also explain that there is less chance of misinterpretation in the source language than if you hire a translator who doesn't understand the source all that well. Our view is that you can fix a bad but precise target text and make it a good translation, but it takes far more effort to fix a bad and imprecise source translation.

*"I explain why this is usually not recommended" – that I don't understand. Why would anyone want to do this?*

*Subquestions*
*They claim that all their translators work into their respective native language*
*They claim that all texts are either translated or proofread by a native speaker of the target language*
*They explain in some detail when they resort to translation by a non-native speaker of the target language*
*Not applicable*

|  | All | Most | Some | Few | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All translators work into NL | 16.12% | 48.76% | 15.29% | 6.61% | 13.22% |
| Translated or proofread by NS of TL | 22.62% | 48.02% | 14.68% | 4.37% | 10.32% |
| Explain when non-NS of TL is used | 3.32% | 5.21% | 14.69% | 24.64% | 52.13% |
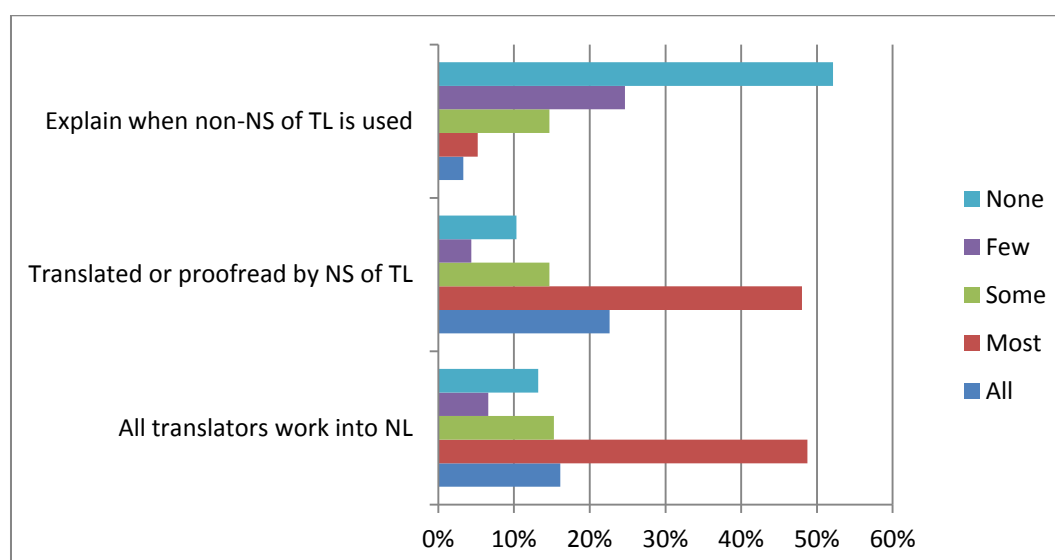


**Sample comments**

*A web site will take anything they write on it. Some (unfortunately too many) agencies will contract the lowest rate, regardless of the translator's native language... if any. Others will relentlessly demand top quality, and painstakingly enforce it, even if their staff has limited knowledge in the target language. At the end of the day, what counts is my earlier analogy of only birds being licensed to fly aircrafts. I've seen too many bad translations by people working into their native language. On the other hand, I've read dazzlingly brilliant texts originally written by translators in their L2, while these very translators openly state that they won't translate into that L2. So what the agency says is often different from what they actually do.*

All companies claim they use only expert native speakers on their Web sites. Never seen anyone claim otherwise. But not all companies stick to that claim.

*As explained above, these claims are usually not true and the texts are not proofed at all or by other non-native speakers.*

I am always astonished that many agencies claim they only work with native speakers of the target language when this is clearly not the case. They never even check what my native language is, so how would they even know? Based on my quality, they assume I'm a native speaker, but nobody has ever asked me. So they either 'assume' I have a certain native language, or they blatantly lie on their websites. But again, this is irrelevant, as the native language of a translator doesn't matter, only the output is relevant.

*I don't know, or they say nothing. I know there are some companies which work with non-natives despite claiming that they don't. That sort of claim has become one of the standard obligatory marketing devices alongside the crap about 'cutting-edge tech', viz. a CAT tool that relies on Visual Basic runtimes. :P*

I have translated into a non native language for various agencies that claim that all their work translators work only into their respective native language. I think that is rarely true in the case of most agencies, and it does not per se guarantee quality. It does sound nice though, doesn't it?

*I just have no idea, this is not my problem!*

In fact most translation agencies that I work with don't care whether I'm native or not, if only I can produce good quality.

*In Poland it is a very, very common practice to work into non-native, "big" languages, such as English, German, French, etc. Nobody gives it any special explanation.*

It is not my business what my business partners explain to their business partners.

*One of the agencies claims that texts are proof-read by native speakers "when necessary". I am not sure how they determine, when it is necessary. This is not clarified on their website.*

This is what 99% of Polish agencies do, but at least 75% do it for show, because they don't care for quality.
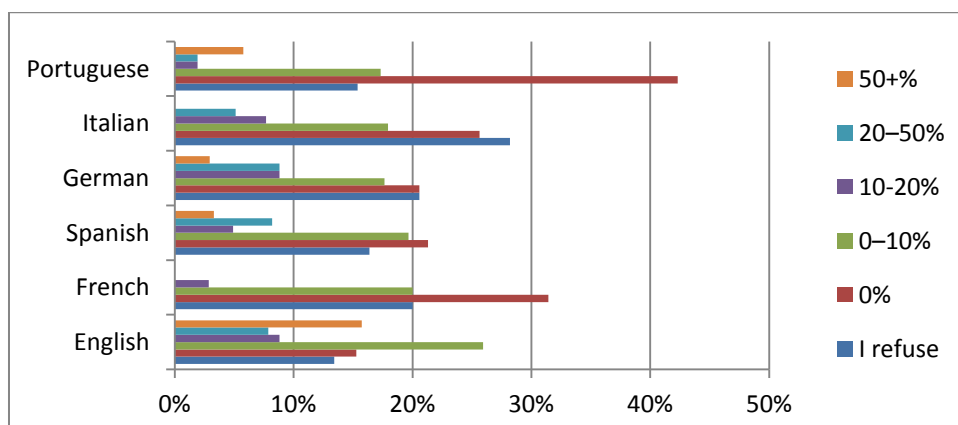
*Q24-25. Do you edit the work of *authors* whose native language is not the target language? // Do you edit the work of *translators* whose native language is not the target language?*

| | *Author* | |
|---|---|---|
| I refuse to edit their work if the target language is not their native language | I refuse | 15.49% |
| I would be willing to do this but I never get such assignments | 0% | 25.31% |
| This represents less than 10% of my editing work | 0–10% | 22.27% |
| This represents 10-20% of my editing work | 10-20% | 5.95% |
| This represents 20-50% of my editing work | 20–50% | 5.95% |
| This represents more than 50% of my editing work | 50+% | 8.44% |
| Other | Other | 16.60% |
| | | |
| Average [Mid-interval values * percentages], with "other" answers removed | | 12.49% |
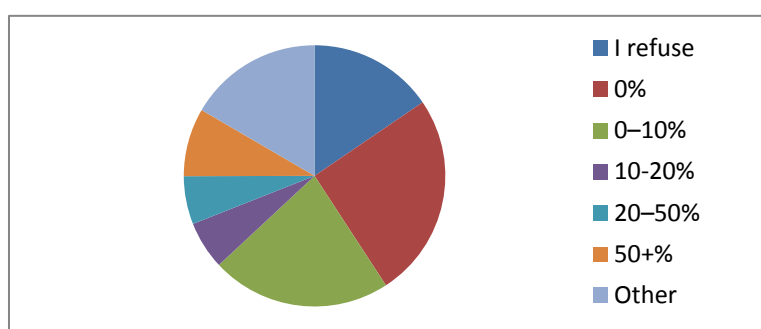


Broken down into native languages (English + PFIGS)

| *Author* | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I refuse | 13.43% | 20% | 16.39% | 20.59% | 28.21% | 15.38% |
| 0% | 15.28% | 31.43% | 21.31% | 20.59% | 25.64% | 42.31% |
| 0–10% | 26% | 20% | 19.67% | 17.65% | 17.95% | 17.31% |
| 10-20% | 8.80% | 2.86% | 4.92% | 8.82% | 7.69% | 1.92% |
| 20–50% | 7.87% | 0% | 8.20% | 8.82% | 5.13% | 1.92% |
| 50+% | 15.74% | 0% | 3.28% | 2.94% | 0.00% | 6% |
| Other | 12.96% | 25.71% | 26.23% | 20.59% | 15.38% | 15.38% |
| | | | | | | |
| Average (as above) | 19.73% | 1.92% | 9.56% | 9.44% | 4.55% | 7.27% |

| *Translator* | |
|---|---|
| I refuse | 22.71% |
| 0% | 18.74% |
| 0–10% | 25.17% |
| 10-20% | 6.16% |
| 20–50% | 6.57% |
| 50+% | 4.92% |
| Other | 15.73% |
| | |
| **Average (as above)** | 9.70% |
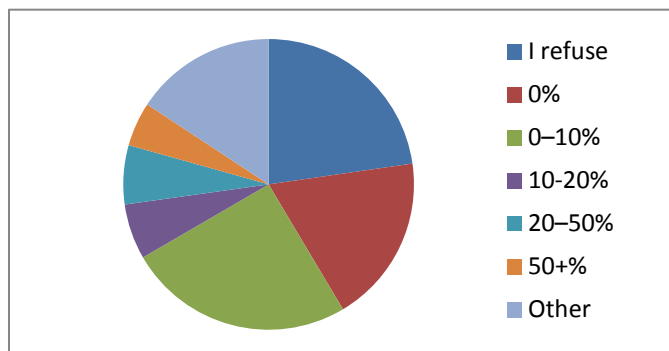


Broken down into native languages again:

| *Translator* | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **I refuse** | 27.31% | 27.78% | 11.29% | 21.43% | 40.48% | 18.52% |
| **0%** | 10.65% | 25% | 27.42% | 11.43% | 11.90% | 37.04% |
| **0–10%** | 25% | 19.44% | 19.35% | 30% | 23.81% | 25.93% |
| **10-20%** | 6.94% | 2.78% | 4.84% | 11.43% | 4.76% | 1.85% |
| **20–50%** | 7.41% | 2.78% | 11.29% | 2.86% | 4.76% | 3.70% |
| **50+%** | 8.33% | 0% | 4.84% | 2.86% | 0.00% | 0% |
| **Other** | 14.35% | 22.22% | 20.97% | 20% | 14.29% | 12.96% |
| | | | | | | |
| **Average (as above)** | 13.00% | 3.04% | 11.74% | 7.95% | 4.17% | 3.30% |
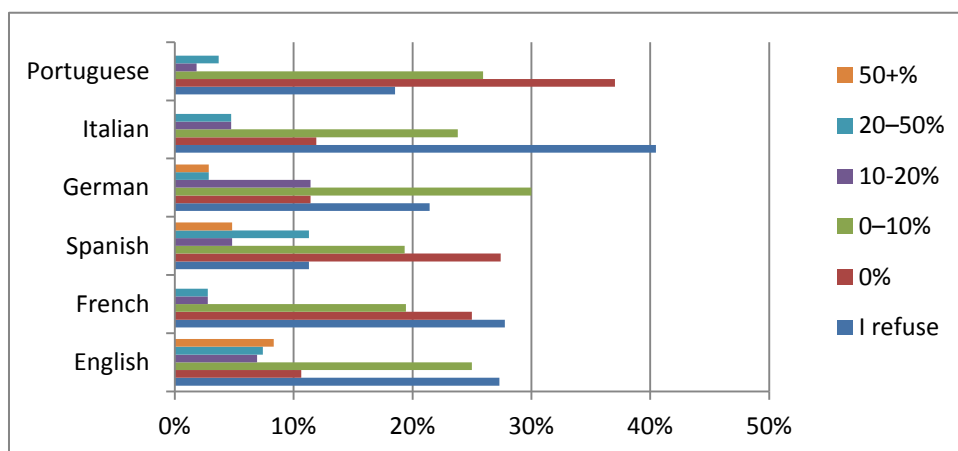


**Observation:** *On average, for native English translators 20% of the editing volume comes from editing texts written by non-native authors and 13% from editing translations done by non-natives.*

**Difference between *author* and *translator*:**

| Volume of editing work from revising non-natives | Global | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Author* | 12.49% | 19.73% | 1.92% | 9.56% | 9.44% | 4.55% | 7.27% |
| *Translator* | 9.70% | 13.00% | 3.04% | 11.74% | 7.95% | 4.17% | 3.30% |
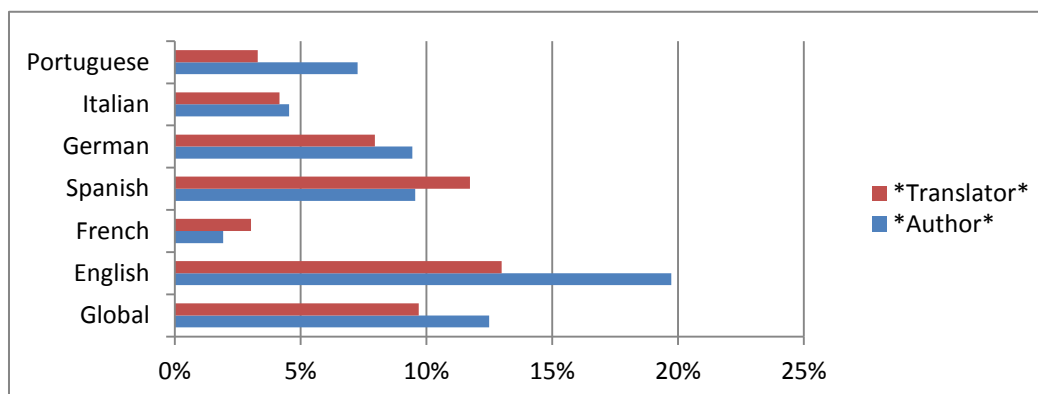


**Sample comments (Q24 – Author)**

*80% of my professional career has been served 'in-house'. That business environment quickly teaches you that 'mirror translation' without 'effective communication' is of no use to anyone and just good for the paper bin. This means; if the author (and Japanese engineers that are not literate, even in their L1, are many) get into a muddle explaining something, write something that over several paragraphs does not make logical sense or is inconsistent, I see my role and responsibility in staying alert about this, challenge it, call the author to ascertain his intended meaning, discuss with him what I propose and finalise the passage into the target language. If he is unavailable, I add footnotes suggesting a plausible interpretation for later follow-up check. Another aspect of Jp>En technical translation is that Japanese expression in in-house technical documents can be easily split into informality and become highly elliptic. So, if translated word for word, too much of it is missing that the Western reader demand to see in print. The implied part has to be worked out from the dynamics of the situation/ purpose of the paper/ argument of the discourse, (read between the lines, in other words) and supplemented as often as necessary [like this] (so the reader is always kept aware of what the original actually stated black on white.) I call that "value-added" translation. I have always practised it 'as appropriate and needed', and received thanks and appreciation for saving the in-house engineers I supported: time, headaches, and freedom from forced divided attention between having to work out a clever solution to the specs they were reading and trying to figure out what the heck the author was driving at. Of course, the situation is quite different with legal documents and contracts for which mirror translation is mandatory, regardless whether the translator acts as neutral third party or as counsel.*

It's an occasionally attractive segment market in my language combination, with demand depending on a number of factors. In any case, it's an extremely good way to consolidate strong and positive ties with good clients (since you demonstrate so very clearly where your added value lies).

*I am happy to do this work. I prefer the author's native language to be one of my source languages. It is easier to figure out what the author is trying to say when this is the case.*

I simply don't enjoy it, so I don't offer this service.

*At present I only do this for trusted academic colleagues and other academics whose English is at a high level to begin with (often higher than the level of the general UK population). In addition such colleagues are very used to taking feedback on their work and indeed seek it out so it has not proved problematic when I have made suggestions about how to clarify the work.*

I am considering this for one fiction author with whom the usual author-translator relationship has not worked out. He is thinking of doing the translation himself, into his non-native language, and has asked me if I would *consider* editing (for egregious errors only). I said I would try it and we'd see how it went. I doubt that this approach will satisfy either of us.

*Generally, I do not want such assignment because they are very time-consuming and sometimes frustrating.*

I am looking into doing this. I would prefer it to editing non-native translations as I believe the author realizes their work needs editing and would be open to criticisms and suggestions.

*I do a fair amount of editing for various Polish academic institutions where the scholars write highly specialised articles in a wide range of fields for international publications and then request editing from the perspectives of grammar, syntax, style and register. On occasion, I have also received such requests from scholars in other countries. The percentage varies.*

I have done this on very rare occasions. It is usually horrible work (translating from scratch is usually easier), so I would not say that I am "willing" to do it, but – never say never. If the money is good enough...

*I hate doing this because there is always a certain amount of guesswork involved when editing it, but some valued clients steadfastly insist on using such work.*

I once edited the work of a native Dutch speaker and he was furious with how much I had changed the text. But it was a brochure advertising his company and needed to read beautifully. He thought he could speak English well. He did, just not well enough to write something that would spur a Brit to buy his product.

*I would be willing to do this if I was paid per hour.*

Many Swedish academics are required to write in English, but the practice is to have the text edited by a native English speaker.

*Typically Scandinavians have a very over-inflated sense of their own English abilities. This causes them to question things that are completely correct.*

The format and style of letters and academic papers in Japanese are very different from those in English. Authors often write in rough English in an appropriate English style, then have the letter/paper edited. This often produces a better result than translating into English from something written in a Japanese style/format.

**Observation:** *The demand for such services is almost non-existent in small languages, whereas the editing of academic articles written in English by non-native speakers may be a major source of highly lucrative work for those specializing in the respective fields.*

**Sample comments (Q25 – Translator)**

*I work in tandem on a regular basis with two first-class translators who are native speakers of Polish and translate into English in the subject fields in which they are highly specialised. They ask me to look at their work and polish it as necessary from the linguistic point of view. We also offer this 'in-tandem' service to clients as a solution on occasion. By the same token, I ask them to look at my PL>EN translations in order to ensure that, as a non-native speaker of Polish, I have not missed or misinterpreted any nuances, be they linguistic, cultural, historical, etc.*

...and I hate it [English, 20-50%]

*Because there are so many Chinese speakers translating into English, the Chinese translator/English editor model is relatively common. Within the Chinese industry, it is probably the dominant model, and the way agencies talk about this model reveals how they think it works: the editor is usually described as "adding colour". The theory seems to be that the native Chinese translator will understand the source perfectly, and will reproduce the meaning accurately, but perhaps using unattractive language. The editor, who often does not speak Chinese, will perform cosmetic work on the language only. Needless to say, this model often breaks down, and tends to produce low quality translations.*

Now and then I get hired to fix/salvage horrible human translation, often into their "native" language. Some investigation led me to ascertain that translation performed for about half my rates results in an overall quality level comparable to free online Google Translate's, though the flaws differ in nature. Such occurrences convinced me that the native speaker attribute plays a minor role – if any – in the equation.

*I refuse to edit anything unless I know the translator and their work. Otherwise, it is too hard on my blood pressure, trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.*

Generally speaking, Russian translators are cheaper than English translators. As a result, it is fairly standard practice for an agency to have the translation done by a non-native speaker, and then proofread/edited by a native speaker.

*I accepted one and spent 3 awful days muttering "never again! Never again!"*

I avoid this like the plague. They have to be very good for me to agree to it, because I translate like a bat out of hell.

*I got badly burned by taking on a large editing job. The translator was a native Spanish speaker – she translated 90,000 words into English and clearly used Google Translate. In the end, I realized it would have been quicker to translate than to fix it. But I was just starting out and very naïve.*

I used to but since the financial crisis the quality of translation has deteriorated such that I refuse to do any editing except for one client whom I trust. The work is usually from their in-house translator and is good. Now and again I get documents from other non-natives they have used. These are legal translations and generally extremely archaic.

*I usually do it only as a mentor for others learning to translate. As far as editing for clients goes, I have no way of knowing the native language of the translator whose work I might be editing.*

I would do this under the same conditions I edit for non-native authors, and for the same rates, which would most likely make the non-native translator prohibitively expensive for her clients (and rightly so).

*Only for one client where the in-house translators have area-specific knowledge.*

Particularly in tourist industry texts I translate, clients often translate the texts for themselves and ask for editing.

*Very rarely. For me this rates in the same category as "fixing" work of native translators (or possibly native (self-proclaimed) "translators" :)) whose work is not very good. Do-able if necessary (for very good clients), but often irritating since I do wonder about the professional ethics of people pitching for a job that they cannot do well. (OK, they are not often evil and conniving, instead they are sweet and/or earnest and/or clueless). But it really is unfair to clients.*

*Q26. If you edit a translation that was not done by a native speaker of the target language, are you informed of this in advance?*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Always | 79 | 10.93% |
| Usually | 83 | 11.48% |
| Sometimes | 86 | 11.89% |
| Rarely | 115 | 15.91% |
| Never | 106 | 14.66% |
| Not applicable | 219 | 30.29% |
| Other | 35 | 4.84% |
| Total | 723 | |
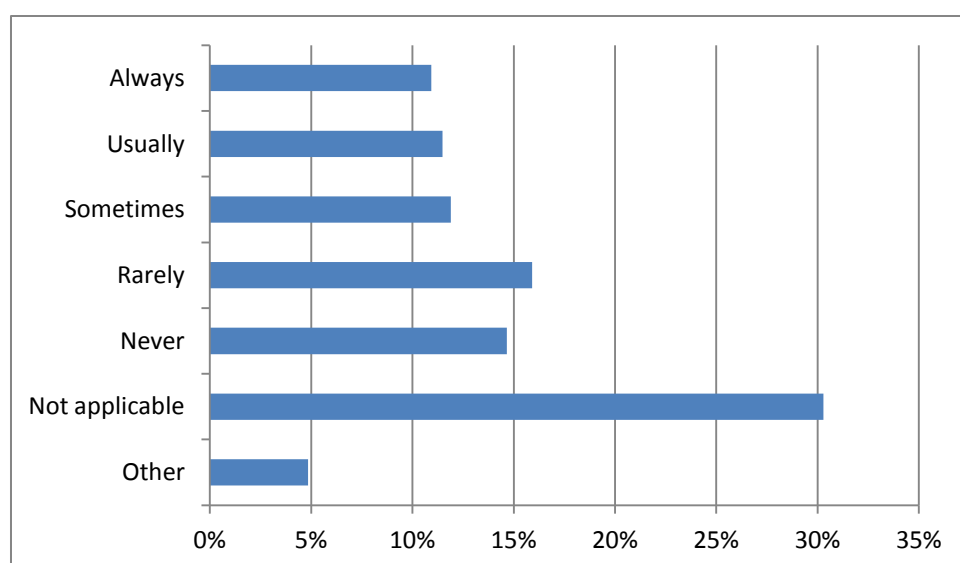


**Observation:** *More often than not, editors are not informed that the translation was done by a non-native speaker of the target language.*

**Sample comments**

*Yes. That's part of the deal (clients explain the background to the work they are proposing). In any case it jumps out at you within the first two lines.*

I don't think this kind of information is ever provided unless you ask the client about it specifically.

*Actually, it might not be necessary for I can tell when a text is written by a non-native speaker.*

I always work more or less with the same team of colleagues and we are all native speakers of Spanish, so I always know whose work I'm editing.

*I am paid by the hour for revision, so my project managers know better than to saddle me with a non-native translation. However, it happens sometimes. I am sure the PM's would tell me, but they rarely notice themselves that the translation is by a non-native translator. I am usually the one who recognizes it.*

I can see this immediately, no need to inform... then, common practice is to use local workforce anyways

*Anyway, it is not difficult to understand....*

I have had a few exceptional situations, where no translator of an exotic language to English was available, and so we used two different translators who don't know each other and compared the outcome (except, in the seventies, the very first time it happened, and I learned from the experience – the two translators knew each other and "agreed" on the translation.)

*I like to know who the translator is so I don't waste my time with subpar work.*

I only do this for individuals I know personally. And I do not offer editing services openly to avoid such traps.

*I really don't know whether an agency would provide this information in advance. However, in any case that I see that the translation was not done by a native – which, in my opinion, is very easy to spot in Greek – I let the agency know and refuse to continue the job under the original terms.*

I think it is a general understanding that people do not translate into Czech unless they are native speakers.

*[Rarely] ...but it's obvious.*

## Q27. When you edit a translation, do you recognize whether it was done by a native speaker of the target language?

| | |
|---|---|
| I can always recognize it | 45.98% |
| I can usually recognize it | 39.01% |
| I can rarely recognize it | 0.67% |
| I cannot recognize it | 0.54% |
| Not applicable | 13.81% |
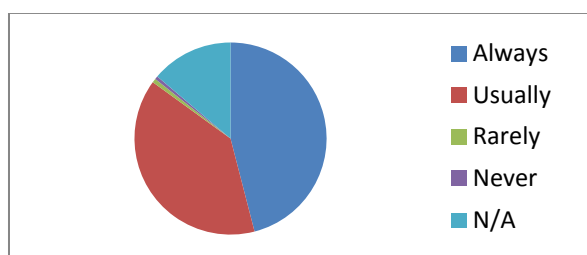


**Observation:** *Hardly any respondents chose the "rarely" or "never" (cannot) options. It may, nonetheless, be useful to mention a comment to Q30: '[Translation into a non-native language] is more common than many working translators realize, because a truly bidirectional translator appears to be a "native translator" to most observers.'*

**Sample comments**

*They say that only a native speaker can understand if someone is not a native speaker. I find this true both orally and in written texts.*

There are always indications through odd language use. Sometimes the language use is downright incorrect. It is a waste of time to have to edit this sort of work. People should stick to translating into their native languages only (or languages they now consider to be their first language, and which they can speak exactly like a native speaker)

*After some time editing you recognize even the country of the translator.*

Prepositions are the main hint – choosing the right preposition is very difficult in any non-native language.

*It is always recognizable before the end of the first paragraph. In many cases the region where the person is from is also recognizable.*

Even with the very best – i.e. the few errors the really good L2s make are different to the sort of errors natives make, and these are very jarring. Does not mean in those EXTREMELY isolated cases that these people should not in some cases work into English, but it does mean they ALWAYS need a proofreader.

*As with me translating into my non native languages for my own reference and not publication it is generally the very small words like prepositions and idioms that give it away—the big things not the little things! This is partly because I mostly read texts by high level non-native speakers.*

Errors in style are a usual indicator, but these may be caused by a native author's style being "contaminated" from too much exposure in the source language.

*Usually expressions, collocations and the way of thinking gives them away.*

There are very distinctive differences between Japanese and English (which I was also introduced to when training to teach English in Japan) that usually give a native Japanese speaker away. I may not notice it as much with other languages and a native English speaker with poor writing ability and vocabulary may look like a non-native speaker. With the translation or writing by Chinese native speakers, the linguistic quality is poor enough that it is unmistakably by a non-native speaker.

*When asked to evaluate a translation by an agency (as I described in question 26), I used to think I could always tell. However, I've since encountered sloppy work by known target-native translators and realized that lazy target-natives will produce work that mimics that of fairly competent target non-natives, simply because it's easier to produce Dunglish when translating than to do the harder work of recasting sentences into good English. (For example: leaving all sentences in the passive form, which is much more common in NL than EN; accepting "false friends" at face value rather than finding the correct EN word.)*

Sometimes I think they were not written by a native, and in fact they were :-P

*There are errors only committed by non-natives.*

Only when mistakes are obvious. There can be an enormous variety of competencies between the obvious non-native and the "perfect native".

*On the one hand, there are certain translation errors that are typical of non-native speakers. On the other, there are different translation errors that are more typical of less-experienced translators working into their native language. So it's usually (\*almost\* always) easy to determine which of these is the case.*

It's rare for a non-native speaker to use articles, prepositions and the present perfect tense correctly. Even if they do, there are normally some slightly odd phrasings – often quite quaint and old-fashioned and/or rather too formal.

*It is always "little" things that are indicative that the translator is a non-native, like prepositions for example. When they are recurrent, with the wrong verb. I know that the translator is not French. When it is a legal document, it gets worse of course.*

I usually cannot differentiate a translation done by a non-native from a translation done and proofread by native amateurs.

*Interference errors are usually easy to identify in my language pair.*

I have on occasion come across translations that read like they were done by non-natives but were actually the work of native speakers.

*I have met 1 native German speaker in my entire career who might be confused with a native English speaker.*

Assuming it is that nebulous thing we call a "good translation", I can normally tell the *competence* of the translator in the target language. I cannot always be sure that the translator is a native speaker of the target language but generally speaking I have found that native speakers make different mistakes or are careless in different ways to either "fully bilingual/trilingual" translators or non-native speakers of the target language. These nuances in these errors or omissions are very slight, but to an active member of the grammar police force like me, immediately apparent. Some native speakers have an idiosyncratic style which may at first be perceived as "non native", but later recognised as being influenced by a variant – or register – of English with which I may not be particularly familiar. I think it is dangerous to make assumptions.

*You can always tell when it wasn't done by a native speaker...*

Are you kidding? The only question sometimes is whether it's a good machine translation (also recognizable) or a bad non-native speaker.

*Q28. Compared to native speakers of the target language, do non-native speakers make more or fewer errors in each of the categories listed below?*

| | More (+1) | About the same (0) | Fewer (-1) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Spelling error | 34.23% | 53.57% | 12.20% |
| Grammar or syntax error | 79.18% | 17.01% | 3.81% |
| Terminology error | 56.46% | 38.93% | 4.61% |
| Wrong collocation/usage | 87.17% | 11.50% | 1.33% |
| Misunderstanding of the source text | 38.60% | 38.45% | 22.95% |
| Stylistic/register error | 79.23% | 19.44% | 1.34% |
| Meaningless sentence | 59.70% | 35.82% | 4.48% |
| Addition/omission | 29.11% | 64.86% | 6.03% |
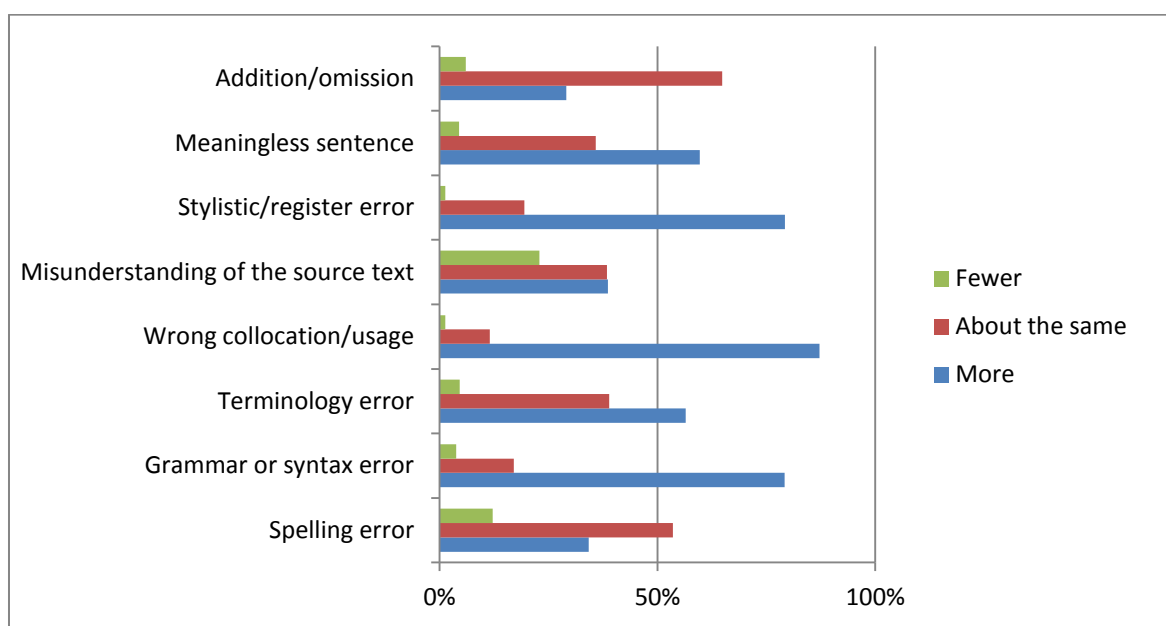


**Observation:** *Using the numerical weights given in the header (More = +1, Same = 0, Fewer = -1), an average can be calculated in each category. A large positive value indicates that non-native speakers of the target language are prone to make the corresponding mistake considerably more often than natives. (A negative value would indicate that native speakers of the target language make that error more frequently).*

| | |
|---|---|
| Misunderstanding of the source text | 0.16 |
| Spelling error | 0.22 |
| Addition/omission | 0.23 |
| Terminology error | 0.52 |
| Meaningless sentence | 0.55 |
| Grammar or syntax error | 0.75 |
| Stylistic/register error | 0.78 |
| Wrong collocation/usage | 0.86 |
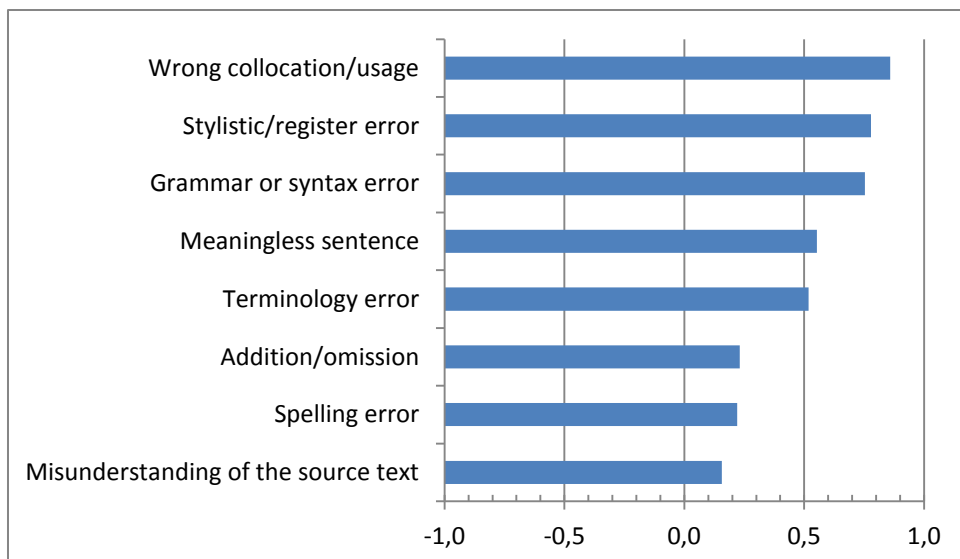
**Observations:** *In line with some earlier comments, errors of wrong collocation/usage and style/register top the list, followed by grammar/syntax . Misunderstanding of the source text ranks last, and based on earlier comments, even a negative score would have been plausible.*

It is interesting to see how these figures depend on experience (15+ years), percentage of editing volume deriving from translations by non-native speakers of the target language (20%+), a combination of these (20%+, 15+y), and certification status.

| | 20+% | 15+ years | Certified | 20+%, 15+y |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Misunderstanding of the source text | 0.05 | 0.20 | 0.03 | 0.19 |
| Spelling error | 0.21 | 0.23 | 0.26 | 0.19 |
| Addition/omission | 0.16 | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.25 |
| Terminology error | 0.52 | 0.50 | 0.43 | 0.55 |
| Meaningless sentence | 0.52 | 0.51 | 0.52 | 0.52 |
| Grammar or syntax error | 0.74 | 0.78 | 0.81 | 0.75 |
| Stylistic/register error | 0.80 | 0.80 | 0.82 | 0.84 |
| Wrong collocation/usage | 0.85 | 0.86 | 0.86 | 0.84 |
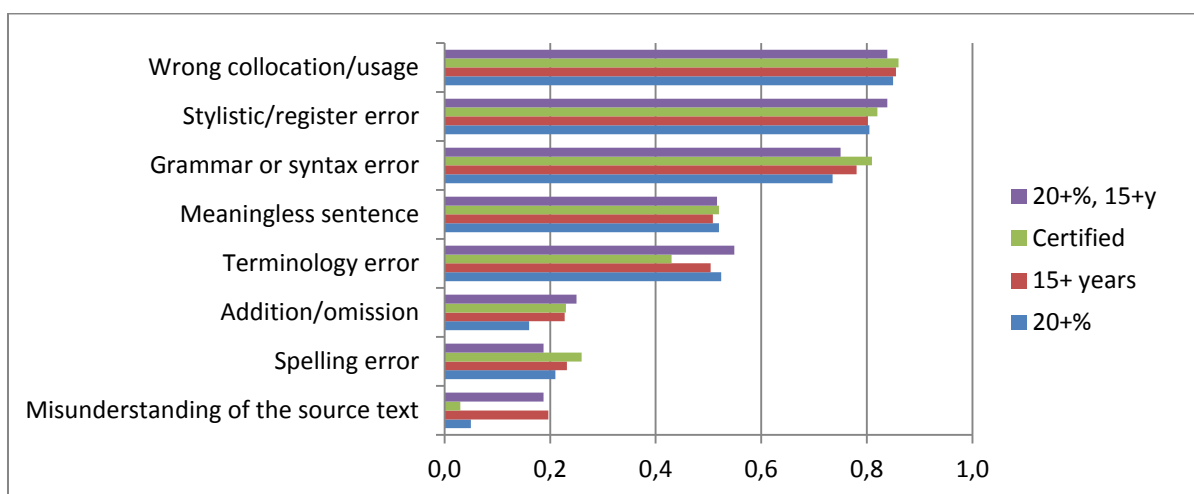
**Observation:** *In the very small sample of certified translators for whom editing non-native translations represents more than 20% of their editing workload, the score for "misunderstanding" is negative. However, this subsample is too small to draw any meaningful statistical conclusion.*

**Sample comments**

*I have just waded through a large project where the English I edited was translated/adapted from the French by a German native who lives in France and has English as her L2, possibly on an equal footing which her competence in French. I have done previous editing work for this person, where the English text was created either from scratch or from a German source by her. This text was far simpler to edit, and contained fewer of the above errors than the French-English project mentioned above. In both cases the spelling errors were probably unnoticed typographical errors. Misunderstandings of the source text included false cognates, or a lack of awareness that English has a specific way to express the source item in question. Sentences were only rendered meaningless is relative clauses or in sentences with more than one subordinate clause, and where they followed the structure of the source text. Additions, often unnecessary, in descriptive texts were fairly common, sometimes at the same time omitting an equally valid word or phrase in the translation. I have focused my comments based on a single individual, but would say they are generally true for other, similarly competent linguists who translate into a language which is not their native, or dominant native language.*

Very often I see the work of bad Chinese native translators and relatively good English native translators, because of the way the markets work. That's not a fair comparison, so I've tried to think of how good natives compare with each other. There is a difference in approach: Chinese natives often tend to be more literal, to stick "closer" to the source, and to use a more limited range of English expression. English natives tend to use more natural sentence patterns and a wider range of expression, but I often see problems in the paragraph structure.

*One of the problems in your survey emerges clearly (for me) right here: are we not comparing apples and oranges? Maybe you should specify "professional" or "experienced" or "top-notch" before both non-native speakers and native speakers, since otherwise the rabble-rousers end up arguing only to specify later on that the really really really good non-native speakers are clearly better than the clueless native speakers. Obviously. But what kind of professional discussion is that? :-) In my answers above, I'm referring to skilled, high-level translators who are native speakers, OK? And the non-natives are also skilled high-level practitioners. BTW, you should have a fourth column: "Depends". E.g., for specialists, additions and omissions are often not errors at all. And if you have a highly specialized non-native speaker, terminology may sometimes be OK but style will be generally be iffier. And so on and so on.*

Believe it or not, in my experience native speakers tend to make more errors in the "meaningless sentence". I think it has to do with the fact that native speakers are more error-prone in the "misunderstanding of the source text" category. Also, a possible explanation is that, when translating into their native language, translators tend to make less reviewing steps (excess of confidence).

*This really refers more to texts written in the target language by a non-native speaker, rather than translations. Swedes who are forced by universities or companies to write in English often have a very good grasp of accepted terminology in their fields, but make basic grammatical and stylistic errors.*

Collocations and homonyms are usually the biggest signs. Native speakers of the source language may misunderstand the source text less, but can fail to express it in the target language which gives the same result of a mistranslation.

*This question is related much more to the competence and skill of the translator than it is to whether the translator is a native speaker. Native speakers can produce horrible translations/texts and vice versa. I actually think this is not a useful question and the results could be very misleading.*

This is just my opinion, of course, but I am certain that I (a very conscientious, perfectionist translator) would make more of these mistakes than a target-native translator of comparable quality. I might well make fewer of these mistakes than a lazy target-native translator (as I described in question 27). Even so, a conscientious and talented target-native will always, always beat what any non-native could produce.

*Nonnative speakers of English don't typically have a good command of register or regional English (i.e., they confuse British and American English or mix both in one translation). Such translators rarely have misunderstood the source material, but often don't know how to express a phrase fluidly, smoothly, or idiomatically in English. (Such translations can be very literal/word-for-word.)*

Misunderstanding the source text is a factor that should not be underestimated. Judging by comments posted on proZ.com, a surprisingly high number of native speakers of the target language (here: English) only have a tenuous command of the source language (here: German). On balance, though, it's still better to translate into your native language even though I claim to be the exception to the rule.

*'Misunderstanding of the source text' is the key area where non-native speakers of the target language are (usually) better. However, this doesn't automatically help them produce a good translation. Very convoluted grammar or heavy slang are the two types of sentences where the native speaker of the target language is likely to miss the mark completely.*

This is an answer with a limited value. How much does one know of other people's work? And how many translators do we know? I dare to answer based on the fact that I'm used to supervising other translators (not counting my pupils, however), but this is not the typical task of all translators...

*Very few translators working into their non-native language (i.e. Arabic-speakers working into English, since the other direction is almost an extinct species) make mistakes in grammar or spelling. They are actually better in these two domains because of the way English is taught there. But they sometimes lack the cultural context, and that reflects on idiomatic usage and collocations.*

One of the major "give-aways" are prepositions as well as lengthy sentences by which some such translators attempt to hide their lack of understanding/misunderstanding of terminology.

## Q29. Under what circumstances is it acceptable for a translator to translate into a non-native language?

**Observation:** *Over 630 comments received – some of which were insightful half-page case studies.*

**Sample comments**

*A gun held to the head – but caliber must be above 0.30. In many cases they might survive a head shot with 0.22 so it would be worth the risk.*

a) When a person foreign to the culture or language cannot catch some specific information. Case in point, last year I edited a translation of a letter to be used as an exhibit in a trial. The translator identified the letter as being the lyrics of a Colombian song that was popular in the 70's. A non native probably would have missed it. b) When the translator knows the subject matter very well. One of my clients jokes that I know the product line (in English and in Spanish) as well as their sales engineers.

*Some source texts are incomprehensible for non-natives. I once translated Dutch letters, written from prison, into Polish. Handwritten, a lot of strange words, associations, incomplete sentences etc. In that case I used a reviser who corrected my Polish. Another situation: very specialist texts must be translated by a specialist and revised by a linguist, who has knowledge of the source language. Being a native alone is not enough however. They should have experience in translating and preferably have knowledge of the source language.*

Being a native speaker of the target language is often an excellent indicator of authenticity. But not always: in expert-to-expert communication among scientists deep subject matter knowledge is the top priority. An L1->L2 expert translator with a near-native command of the target language can produce a translation that is either fit for purpose (e.g., for publication in a peer-reviewed journal with an international readership and author pool) or that will require a reasonable amount of proof-reading. Another obvious case is when understanding the nuances of the source text requires native-level understanding. Literary translators sometimes work together with the author (see Umberto Eco's *Rat or Mouse*), or in couple, with a native speaker of the source language. In small source language to big target language combinations (e.g., Eastern European languages to English and FIGS), it is common practice that the translation is done by a native speaker of the source language in collaboration with another translator of the reverse language pair. That way native-level competence in both the source and target language is ensured. Admittedly, connecting the two native-level competences may require some extra communication between the participants, but a lot of successful examples show that it is possible.
In translation for intelligence purposes, messages may need to be decoded. This often needs native-level command of the source language, while target-language requirements may be met more easily (near-natives may be able to convey the meaning clearly, or their output can be edited). Wherever stylistic and usage errors deprive the target-language communication of its authenticity, non-native speakers' work has to be reworked, without fail, by natives. And in most cases it turns out that it makes much more sense to have the translation done by a native speaker of the target language, and checked by a native speaker of the source language if necessary.

*When they need to back-translate their translation for foreign clients.*

1. Source language that is very informal: Example: transcription of audio surveillance of a suspected criminal from another country, spoken in the person's native language, for use by law enforcement. 2. Current information from a society undergoing great changes, with new laws, regulations, political parties, etc.

*I am an engineer who translate highly technical texts for other engineers who are not native English speakers either, and not for translations agencies. It may sound as anathema for a linguist, but my customers expect speed (up to 10.000 words per day) and not 100% grammatical correctness they don't mind about.*

When the purpose of a translation is strictly informational or when conditions require that a native in the source language deals with the material (e.g., verbatim in market research).

*I believe it is sometimes acceptable for a translator to translate into a non-native language. A German medical doctor with excellent English skills, for example, could be a better choice than a native speaker with inadequate knowledge of medicine.*

I personally believe that the best translations are done by two translators: a native of the source language and one of the target language. Any time there is any complexity in the source language, a native should at least be available to review the document and answer questions.

*Life or death situation with no other option. (This can be the "well, it's better than \*nothing\*" argument assuming the buyer is told precision that.) Suitable native revision in place from the start. Your "acceptable" is odd here: more often than not (again: in my market segments) it is simply \*more profitable\* for a translator to work into his or her native language, assuming mastery of the subject. Just as specialized work is more intellectually interesting and certainly more lucrative than generalist work.*

a) For languages of limited diffusion. Maltese, the Baltic languages and Slovenian are evidently a particular problem in the EU at the moment. b) In the case of subject areas for which there are few – if any – expert translators who are TL native speakers. There are basically no such subject areas for German->English.

*If the translator has a background in a particular field and it is more important that the meaning of the text is absolutely accurate than the style of the writing. For example, a hospital discharge report has never a good flow or great style. A language teacher would comment just about everywhere that the sentences are not complete, missing a verb, etc. When translating such a report it is a lot more important to understand the medical meaning than to add style to it.*

When the source language is incredibly difficult, such as archaic English into Portuguese. A native Portuguese speaker would not understand the archaic English so he or she must work with a native English speaker to interpret and then translate the text in writing.

*In general, I don't believe it is acceptable in a professional context. To some extent I agree with the argument that in some language pairs there aren't many native speakers of the target language who are capable of completing the translation. All too often, however, that is used as an excuse to use a cheaper non-native translator rather than pay the premium charged by the few truly native speakers.*

When translating a rare language of indigenous people such as Kuna (Panamanian indigenous language) – some languages are so rare, the ideal situation of finding a native-language translator for a minority language pair is not always feasible or realistic. E.g. if somebody requested a translation of Kuna to French (unlikely, but just as an example), you would not find a native French translator on the planet offering this pair. So you would have to use a Kuna to Spanish Panamanian translator who also translates into French and have the result edited. Sometimes it is just not possible to have the ideal world solution and reality has to kick in.

*I must say it's probably a matter of necessity above all. I am sometimes short on work and I'll take translation jobs into English, even though it is not my native language and will not give it a second thought. I wouldn't take such a job, though, if I thought my translation would somehow compromise the quality of the information.*

I find it curious that this question comes so late in this survey (No. 29!). I believe this is actually the most essential question in this entire debate. Should we be translating into a non-native language at all? It should be the FIRST question. I find the survey flawed for ignoring this question at the outset, only to squeeze it in at the end of the survey.

*Where the translation is for Information purposes only and the subject of the ST is so complex that it would be difficult or impossible to find a native speaker with the in-depth subject-specific knowledge to do justice to the text – complex areas of legal translation, for instance. Although in this case I would recommend a native speaker translator working with a SL lawyer.*

When they're so good at it that they become an alternative to "good" native translators and are able to discuss things with "very good" native translators eye to eye. When they form a team of "translator – non-native editor native in the target language – native finalizing party". To ensure accuracy.

*When they are expert of a niche field and the text is not particularly fluent. Eg. Medical reports/ SDS of chemicals / Lists of specialised products, etc. However, the proofreading from a native is of paramount importance.*

If the client cannot afford the rates charged by translators whose native language is the required target language. If there are simply no native translators available.

*Emergency situations where no one better is available and postponement is impossible. I can imagine several interpreter situations for this (plane crash, hostage situation) but few translator situations; written text is by its nature generally less urgent than spoken.*

When their language skills are up to it. As stated above, I have only met 1 translator to whom this might apply (DE-->EN).

*When the source text is particularly hermetic, multi-layered or nuanced (e.g. poetry), or in a very specialist field that may difficult for a target-language translator to access or understand. Slang, dialect and cultural references may need a source-language advisor, if not a translator. A lot depends on the intended end use of the translation.*

When there are very few translators on the reverse pair and plenty of jobs.

*The present-day world needs a lot of translations into English; particularly in the case of small languages, there are not enough native English speakers who would do the work.*

When the language combination is rare and it is difficult to find a native speaker (translator) for the particular language combination. Eg. You can find many translators who are native speakers of Macedonian and translate from English into Macedonian, but there is much smaller number of native speakers of English who translate from Macedonian into English.

*When the translator is fluent, educated, and lives (or lived) in the non-native language country. Under extreme circumstances: others in case of an emergency. NEVER: to save money on the translation.*

The answer is simple: when they do a good job. To be more helpful, I will attempt to answer a different question: When does it make most sense to use a translator working into a non-native language? My answer to that is: When there's a shortage of qualified translators who are native speakers of the target language. For example, many Russian scientists also work as translators from time to time. As subject matter experts, they are able to translate Russian scientific texts faithfully, if not beautifully. After careful proofreading by a native speaker of English the end product may become quite good. The alternative would be to hire a qualified translator who's a native speaker of English and is also a subject matter expert. Well, there just aren't enough of those, unfortunately. I'm sure there are other, more exotic / rare languages where this imbalance is even more pronounced, i.e. there may be literally NO ideal candidates who would be a) subject matter experts, b) native speakers of English and c) fluent in the source language. In that case, no alternatives exist.

*When he/she is a sworn translator, like me.*

How many English speakers have the command of, say, Latvian to meet the demand for Latvian-English? In a nutshell, it is acceptable if the client knows what is happening AND fully understands the risks AND how to mitigate them.

*Under circumstances provided for in the Codes of Conduct of the professional bodies for translators (CIOL / ITI in the UK)*

When a small country wants / needs/ has to promote itself in the wide world and there aren't many representatives of the target language who are capable of providing at least bearable translations, what else can be done?

*Target language is relatively easy. Target language is mastered very well (years of working and living in the US, working in international companies). Subject matter expertise. Has done a lot of translations from the non-native language, so knows the terminology. Knows how to use spell check, QA, machine translation to obtain perfect quality.*

There is much more work into the non-native language I work with – English – than into my native language. I need to work. I make sure my work is acceptable.

*If there are very few speakers of his or her native language, who can translate out of it into their native languages; this probably applies to many languages outside Europe, but I can see little justification in Europe for not making the greatest efforts to find a translator to translate from the source into his/her native language.*

Only in very rare language pairs where there are few translators in that direction going into their native language. Perhaps Thai into English, for example. In this case, a native speaker of English should ALWAYS review it. In my languages, Spanish and English, translating inversely is unacceptable.

*I'm very positive about non-native translators. They are an unavoidable fact of my language pair, and I believe that with proper training and proper quality control procedures, Chinese natives can do excellent commercial translation into English. We are stymied at the moment by endemic low quality in the Chinese market and the resulting separation (and sometimes even mutual antagonism) between the English-native section of the market and the Chinese-native section.*

If the result is a native-level translation, who cares how it was created? If the translator is able to produce it, either by his/her own effort or by working together with an editor, it should be OK. In specialty fields, subject matter expertise may be more important than perfect grammar. Understanding the source text, its possible nuances may be of crucial importance, in which case it is better if a person who is native in the source translates it. If the quality of the target is also important, then have a native editor smooth it. Also, in language pairs where there is a limited number of target-native translators it is not only an "acceptable" thing, but a necessity.

*If the text is for publication, it has to be proofed by a NS. Otherwise I wouldn't call it "acceptable" but "necessary" sometimes. There are just not enough native speakers to translate into English from all minor languages in the world.*

If the translator is well-qualified, I think it is acceptable to translate into a non-native language. I think it is important that the output be revised by a native, though. And if its mandatory under law (as in Argentina) I think it's not only acceptable but necessary.

*I work for direct clients in some highly technical fields, and even if I recommend working with a translator who is a native speaker of the target language, I can understand that clients who trust me hesitate to appeal to somebody they do not know.*

If it's a teacher (that's my case) or if it's a translator who has lived in a country where this language is spoken.

*I guess I am an example – if you do not accept the "two native languages" option. After 50 years of speaking only English (my non-native language in the standard definition), having done all of my university work in the US to the PHD level, I think I may qualify as the exception to a rule that seems based on 20-somethings or perhaps 30-somethings who start to translate after just a few years of language study. This may be one instance where age does matter.*

I think it is acceptable to work in whichever direction a translator feels comfortable in and if there is demand by the market. But what in my opinion is essential is that you make sure it gets proofread by a native speaker in order deliver a quality translation! Translators being cheap about that (needless to say proofreaders want to get paid, too) ruin our profession's reputation (next to the loads of unprofessionals doing translation work).

*If the client is happy with this, then it is acceptable.*

*Q30. Have you encountered projects in which it was better to use a translator whose native language was not the target language?*

|  | General sample | 15+ years | Certified |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | 29.79% | 34.81% | 39.10% |
| No | 70.21% | 65.19% | 60.90% |

## Percentage of 'yes' answers
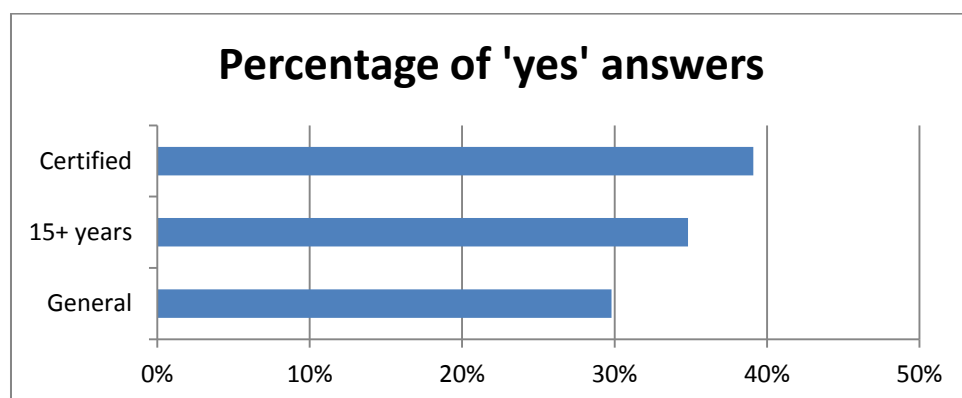


Different percentages are obtained when the sample is broken down by native language:

|  | General | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese | Slavic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 29.79% | 23.94% | 43.24% | 52.46% | 33.33% | 19.05% | 25% | 44.44% |

## Encountered project where NN was better choice
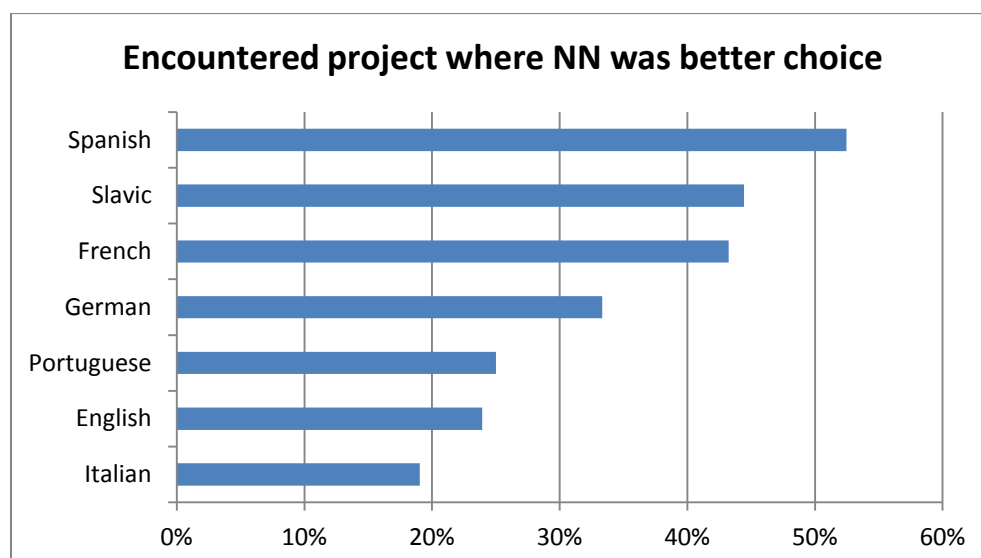


**Sample comments**

*Case #1: Translation of convoluted and florid Brazilian legal opinions into English. It takes a native speaker of Brazilian Portuguese to sort out the mess, believe me.*

*Case #2 Translating into English for readers who do not have a good knowledge of English. I had to use a type of "controlled language" before the term became common. Grammar was OK, terminology was OK, but style was very awkward. The client liked it, the readers understood it and the deal was closed with success.*

I do some interpreting missions as a liaison interpreter during audits in French nuclear power stations. Some team members are previous employees from EDF, the French nuclear power company, and besides knowing all the ins and outs about EDF (and all the jargon, and EDF uses a lot!) some of them are also qualified to go into Restricted Control Areas.

*In my field (screenplays) it is usually better that translators have the same native language as the source material because it includes dialogues, slang, idioms in general and many local references.*

I don't trust non-native speakers' ability to comprehend every nuance of Polish. However, the same goes for other languages. I know an American who can produce almost flawless Polish. People choose her for EN-PL on account of her ability to comprehend the source text. The target can always be worked out between her and her clients' staff. I'd choose her over almost all Poles myself.

*I was sent a transcript of a skype conversation in my native language, and was asked to translate it into English. The text was full of abbreviations, typos and chat colloquialisms, many of which would have been very difficult to pick up for someone who is not a native speaker of the source language. The translation was expected to convey the meaning accurately – without colloquialisms, etc. Looking at the text it became obvious that a jealous boyfriend was spying on his girlfriend, and wanted to know what the conversation was about. Due to the abbreviations, typos, emoticons, and colloquialisms, Google Translate must have failed pretty badly in even that. I refused to take it on, but am convinced that a native speaker of the source language would have done a much better job here than a native speaker of the target language.*

Pharma backtrans, to check for comprehension.

*An interview with an American rock musician (very colloquial, much slang and music industry jargon) proved impossible for the native-French translator to understand.*

In projects where being native in the source language was more important than being native in the target. For example, in some Japanese texts where oral conversation was transcribed, or where the topic caused the writers to be overly polite and cryptic, in those cases native linguistic cultural awareness was crucial in figuring out what they are saying. Pronouns are often omitted in Japanese, there is no differentiation of singular and plural nouns, sometimes it is hard to differentiate present and future tenses, etc. Same goes for Hungarian. I have seen some Hungarian to English translations that were awful, as the translator did not understand the source properly. Hungarian texts can have complicated sentence structures, complex grammar that can cause misunderstanding if read by a non-native.

*- Specialized technical information, written in jargon that is not standard or well known for the source language.*
*- Bi-directional communication. It's often most practical for the same person to translate all correspondence on certain topics in both directions: for example, translation of a technical report or specification written in language A, and then translation of the remarks received from the client in language B.*

Yes, when handwriting is involved. Native speakers of the source language can usually decipher it better.

*Especially for highly colloquial texts as some non-native speakers won't get the strength/real meaning of a particular expression.*

Sigh. Some respondents may answer here that yes, this was a good solution when the client could only find clueless native speakers as the alternative. Sure, that sounds reasonable. For translators who claim that a native speaker of the source language was necessary to read between the lines of the mind-blowingly complex source document, all I can say is that they are selling short those skilled translators who have actually invested the time and effort to become true experts in their source languages and subjects. If I can't understand the texts I'm translating from, what on earth am I doing? What am I claiming to my clients? And yes, this is a direct criticism of those translators who spend far too much time pretending/winging it, and then get huffy when caught out.

*Having a native speaker of the source language is very valuable for finding misunderstandings of the source text, as they can read and understand a translation and compare it to the source with full understanding, but I can't think of any case where having them as the main translator would be better than the alternative.*

Highly specialized texts with an extremely poor wording. You need a subject matter professional to understand it, but when the professional is not a native speaker of the source language, s/he will find it difficult to decipher the poor wording.

*Are you kidding?*

Certain types of legal translations, for instance, in which the source (Italian) text was so convoluted as to require that a native speaker be tasked with drafting with the translation.

*Anywhere where there is a dearth of non-native translators who genuinely specialise in the field.*

Description of local cultural traditions.

*... In some difficult cases the best bet would be to use two translators. One who is perfect in the source language and one perfect in the target.*

I have edited work by a native speaker of English whose translation was so bad that a non-native translator with some experience would have been better. That was before I adopted the personal rule of only editing work of translators I know and whose work I am familiar with.

*I think ideally you have a native speaker of the target language translate and someone with very good subject knowledge who is a translator, but native speaker of the source language edit.*

Legal documents tend to be very country-specific and require a degree of familiarity with the source language and its legal jargon that can only be obtained after reaching near-native fluency and living in the country for several years.

*It can be better to use a Japanese-native translator when translating old hand-written Japanese documents such as government records, simply because very few non-Japanese translators have a sufficient understanding of the historical background in combination with the ability to read script that is no longer taught.*

It was about a highly technical project and we first had two engineers 'battle it out' and then a native speaker took care of the linguistic aspect of the translation

*Medical translation. There's just no-one who can do this other than Chinese native trained medics. I worked on a big medical project where the translation seemed to have been done by Chinese medical professionals. It was extremely high quality, with great technical accuracy. There were characteristic language/grammar errors which we editors could fix, helping the translators to convey their technical subject knowledge accurately. Very satisfying project for a good (American) agency.*

Often, when you don't have other choices (QUALIFIED English native translator working at the rate the client can afford).

*Low-distribution languages such as Sinhalese or Latvian. No excuse with FIGS generally.*

The notion that a translation must always be into the native language is based on the assumption that fluency and easy readability matter more than understanding of source text. This is a fallacy which is typical of Anglo-American translation culture. According to this notion, a translation is "good" or "acceptable" if it reads well for a native – as if it was written by a native of the target text. It fails to acknowledge the importance of the source text and its complete understanding. In complex and delicate translations a source text native is often much better able to grasp nuances and complex grammar and style, which very often simply eludes target text natives.

*Verbatim in market research, due to the frequently 'oral' nature of text.*

Yes some difficult translation projects would really benefit from a collaborative translation (an expert in the source culture, an expert in the target language working together).

*Q31. Should translation associations include in their code of ethics an item stipulating that translators should work only into their native language, or recommendations concerning working into a non-native language?*

|  | General | 15+ years | Certified |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 57.49% | 59.64% | 61.88% |
| **No** | 42.51% | 40.36% | 38.13% |
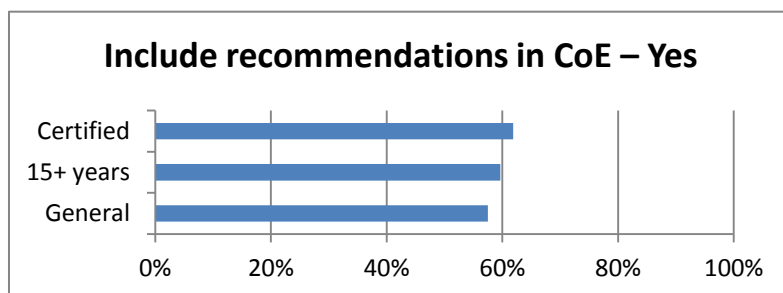


**Observation:** *As the comments below show, the "Yes" answers favor this as a practice to be recommended by translators' associations – rather than a stipulation to be imposed on members. Neither certification status nor experience seems to have a major influence on the percentage of yes answers. There are, however, major variations across languages. Native speakers of English and Italian are most in favor of translators' associations making recommendations about translating into a non-native language (around 75%) – much more than native speakers of German (46%).*

|  | General | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese | Slavic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 57.49% | 75.93% | 59.46% | 52.38% | 46.38% | 73.81% | 54.55% | 36.14% |
| **No** | 42.51% | 24.07% | 40.54% | 47.62% | 53.62% | 26.19% | 45.45% | 63.86% |
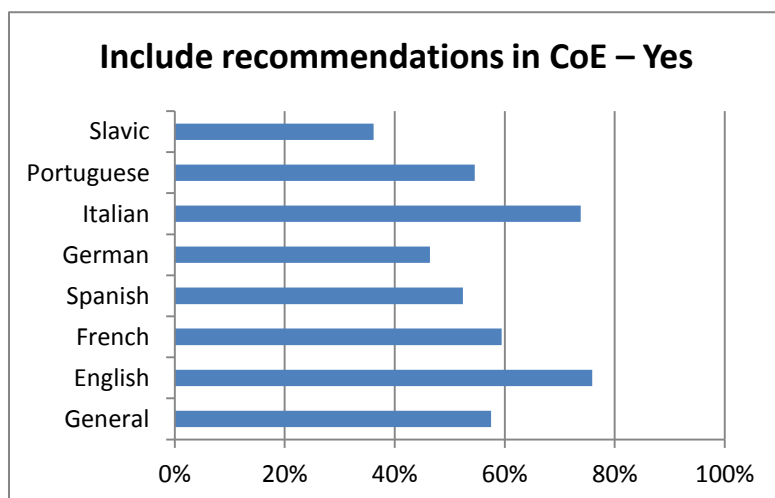


**Sample comments**

*'(...) [O]r recommendations concerning working into a non-native language.' Sure, but then I invite you to make the leap and consider the question I posed above: In what circumstances should a translator translate out of a non-native language? Arbitrarily choosing to extoll the benefits of target nativeness and ignore the benefits of source-native comprehension fails to keep the intellectual rigour I'd expect of a serious professional association.*

Obviously. This is best practice. The associations can then, if absolutely necessary, describe exceptional circumstances in which exceptions may be made. But man is that a slippery slope, since it is always the least skilled practitioners who oversell. (Sorry if that offends but I've spent too much time correcting their work. It's embarrassing for the profession when there isn't a best practice explanation as a starting point.)

*It would be as preposterous as demanding that all professional tango dancers be from Buenos Aires or Montevideo.*

I think that the code of ethics of translation associations should include the provision that you must only accept assignments when you can guarantee the quality of the work, regardless of whether these assignments involve translating into your L1 or L2.... I don't think it's advisable to include a restriction or recommendations regarding working into a non-native language in a code of ethics because I guess that what differentiates a code of ethics from mere "advice" is that it includes only those provisions which make a translator liable to some penalty if they are not complied with.

*Recommendations about working into non-native languages. Although it is rare to have a high level of professional knowledge of a specific area in a non-native language there are people who can do it and it seems wrong to not allow them to do this. I would imagine that for some minority languages, for example, this is even more important as native translators with the right combination of languages and specialisation may not be available.*

Recommendations would be good, though. Many clients in Germany think you're not a fully qualified translator if you start explaining about the "problem" of translating into non-native languages – they think you're simply not good enough and making a fuss. It is widely believed that anyone could translate into English – if only they had the time... An "official explanation"/code of conduct might make it easier to explain the facts to clients.

*Yes, they should have recommendations, i.e. as above, if the client knows what is happening AND fully understands the risks AND how to mitigate them. No, as regards stipulations. Firstly because exceptional circumstance always arise, and there are times when an imperfect service is better than no service. Secondly there are doubtless people whose work into "non-native" languages is entirely acceptable and they doubtless provide a valuable service. (And thirdly, the whole "native language" debate is best avoided.)*

This is very tricky. In general, I would say yes because most translators who work into non-native languages should be strongly discouraged from doing so; however, there are situations in which this is not practical and the translation may serve the client's purpose if done by a proficient non-native translator. It is very important that translation associations not have the power hold their members to a standard that does not address a simple black-and-white situation.

*If competence is assessed (through examination), and therefore proven, there should be no need for the associations themselves to stipulate that translators translate into the native language only. By all means, associations should have a document published in their name stating their agreed views on translating into a non-native target language, but should rely on translators themselves to uphold a code of ethics in line with the associations' generally held views on the matter.*

Translation associations usually include why translators should work only into their native language.

*I work in-house so my name doesn't show up anywhere in connection with my translations but if I work as a free-lance translator I would never translate into my non-native language.*

Yes, regarding pricing (not undercutting native translators' prices) and also stipulating that the texts are proofread by a native speaker.

*To protect themselves, associations, outsourcers, etc, should be allowed to ask translation providers to submit proof and/or references proving the translator's ability to work into a non-native language.*

They should recommend that translators should only translate into their native language.

*Recommendations and caution to potential clients? Yes. Prohibitions? No. Let the Market be the judge. Some professional associations evolve, setting up regulations for the interests of their existing members, to block the accreditation of additional members or their right to practise and be assessed on their standard in providing professional services meeting real life (not academic) needs. The established professionals turn their organisation into a closed shop through various means. The medical profession is one such case. Once the national accrediting organisation has lost half of its government budget through economic austerity / belt tightening policies and been told to operate as a (semi) private concern it tends to look after the interests of the established part of the industry and heed their tacit or privately conveyed desiderata. Results: every year, the newcomers have to jump and clear a much higher bar than the existing members. This policy can be justified when the existing accredited members of up to 20 years standing are getting bad press or bad survey reports for poor performance, but when these are eventually encouraged to refresh their accreditation by sitting the new standard tests, the failure rate was getting so alarming that the accreditation organization was losing its old loyal guard that kept in its good books, supporting it by attending all its events and subscribing to all its publications. So what did it do? It changed its examination system from a two per year to ... individual testing on demand!... What a laugh! This proposed policy to prohibit practitioners from translating into any language but their L1, does not take into account the following facts: – times change: the complexity of material to be handled has increased considerably, requires the acquisition of far more knowledge and investment in research work that part of the old school of 'target =L1' translators is not trained for. Their over confidence, if not complacency, in their command of their native language make some of them invest insufficient effort in sharpening their terminology, or thorough comprehension and even anticipation of the unrolling thread of the discourse and contents. Their concept of translation of some may still be riveted to the 'word' level, not having shifted to the importance of cross cultural communication, the dynamics underpinning transactional situations. Translating into a lifelong frame of reference may be an exercise less conducive to doing justice to all aspects of the foreign communication to be rendered. Why? Because the cross cultural jump that has to be made is simpler and easier, than the radical mental gymnastic to train oneself to do over decades, wiring one's brain to handle to near native level cross correspondences between two foreign cultures.*

Yes – translate into your native language or language of habitual use.

*What matters is performance, not background, degrees, or "native" status. Any stipulation that codifies any parameter other than current performance strikes me as problematic.*

Why not let the market decide?

*They could include as many 'stipulations' as they like; it doesn't mean the translator will abide by them. There is no way to monitor this, so it doesn't really make much sense to add it...*

The native language is the only one for which translators can guarantee the quality their work, if they can't give such a guarantee then they can't charge for that work.

*There are many situations in which a qualified native translator is either not available or simply too expensive. Translation associations should be providing guidance, not promoting closed shops, so no to stipulation and yes to recommendations.*

Yes to recommendations, especially specifying that it is the end user of the translation whose preferences matter in this regard.

*Some non-native speakers have an exceptional command of their target language and this would be a major disadvantage to them. Translation associations ought to test the skills of the affiliated translators and be as strict as possible in their admission process. That is the only valuable indication of quality.*

Professionally speaking, I find it hard to take anyone who translates into a non-native language seriously, and would feel the same way about an association that considered it acceptable practice.

*I do but I think it could be counter-productive. How would it be policed? It would be toothless because you would need to know when/where it is being done and as most associations could not be expected to find an effective method for finding out who is translating into non-native languages, I just can't see how it would be enforceable so any recommendations, and even less codes of ethics, would be ineffective to the point of futility. It falls to agencies and also to direct clients to ensure they don't do it but again, how can it be enforced when it would not be something that could be policed.*

I *thought* the ATA already stipulates this, but I can no longer find their code of ethics on the redesigned website. Besides, they certify translators working into their non-native languages, so I guess they should (if they don't already) at least have recommendations on how to do it right.

*Taking a proficiency test should be enough assurance of quality.*

In Argentina our degrees permit to translate into and from a specific pair of languages. So such a determination would go against what the certificate enables translators to do.

*I cannot imagine why any association would want to impose such general limitations to its members. It is not a mission of any translation association to make our life even more difficult.*

For an explanation, see Campbell, Stuart (1998). Translation into the second language. New York: Longman. Donald Kiraly (look him up) also offers strategies for teaching translation into second and third languages. This practice is more common than many working translators realize, because a truly bidirectional translator appears to be a "native translator" to most observers. Judging who is a "native translator" in the case of these accomplished professionals would be problematic at best, more likely impossible. It would be far better to expend effort educating the profession, and equipping translation teachers with strategies and tools for achieving all components of translational competence, recognizing that it will take more work and time for non-native translators than for the native ones.

*Definitely. Unfortunately, very few people are truly bilingual to the point they can translate into non-native language, especially without editing. In Spain, where I have lived for many years, many people translate from/into all languages they know, which leads to a total disaster: many texts are just barely understandable (touristic brochures/boards and company websites being the most noticeable).*

Both the IoL and ITI assess the experience and proficiency of their members. If a translator were to pass all exams in the appropriate language combination only to be excluded on the basis of his native status, either the examinations are inadequate or the translator should be allowed to practice in the language combination for which he or she has been tested. I would however welcome the requirements for all translators to be assessed in the same way. I find myself in competition at times with native translators who have clearly an inadequate understanding of their source language, and the assumption that they are better translators than me simply because they are native speakers is rather galling.

*And my translation association (CTTIC in Canada) does exactly that, and takes disciplinary action against translators who advertise translation services into a language for which they have not passed the certification exam.*

Absolutely. And there should be a way of verifying that this is being adhered to. I had the misfortune to have (very brief) in-house involvement with a translation agency which declares that it only uses native speakers of the target language. That was far from the truth!

*Absolutely not. There are many excellent translators working into non-native languages and their work is much better that of run-of-the-mill "native-speaker" translators! Also, your survey missed the part about translators needing to be good writers in the first place. A native-speaker who is not a good writer will never be as good as a non-native speaker who is well educated in the non-native language and, in addition, is a good writer in it.*

A translator's association should defend the role of translators in our societies. It is quite difficult to do so if translations are poor because some people engage in jobs they really cannot do properly. I think all translators should be reminded of this ethical question, and a translator's association is the best place for that.

*I'm not entirely sure. I think that most professional translators already know that you should only translate into your native language, but I think it might be good for the end clients to see and get recommendations about what is best.*
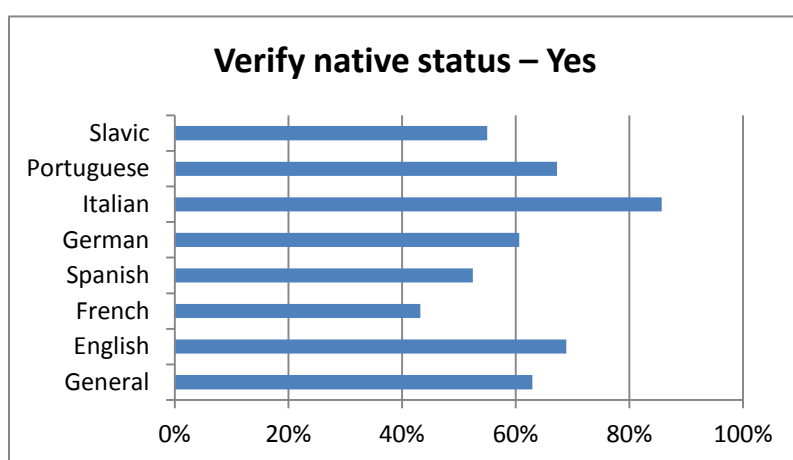
*Q32. Should translation associations verify the native speaker status of their members?*

| | General | 15+ years | Certified |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 62.97% | 63.57% | 61.54% |
| **No** | 37.03% | 36.43% | 38.46% |
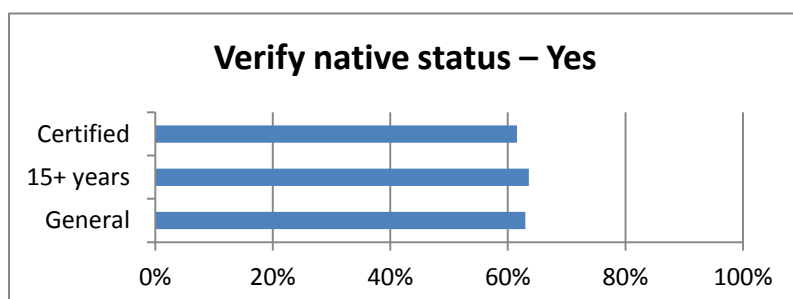


**Observation:** *Neither certification status nor experience seems to have any major influence on the percentage of 'yes' answers. However, huge variations are observed for different native languages – but the pattern is somewhat different from the previous question.*

| | General | English | French | Spanish | German | Italian | Portuguese | Slavic |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Yes** | 62.97% | 68.93% | 43.24% | 52.46% | 60.61% | 85.71% | 67.27% | 55.00% |
| **No** | 37.03% | 31.07% | 56.76% | 47.54% | 39.39% | 14.29% | 32.73% | 45.00% |



Combining Q31 and Q32 into one chart:
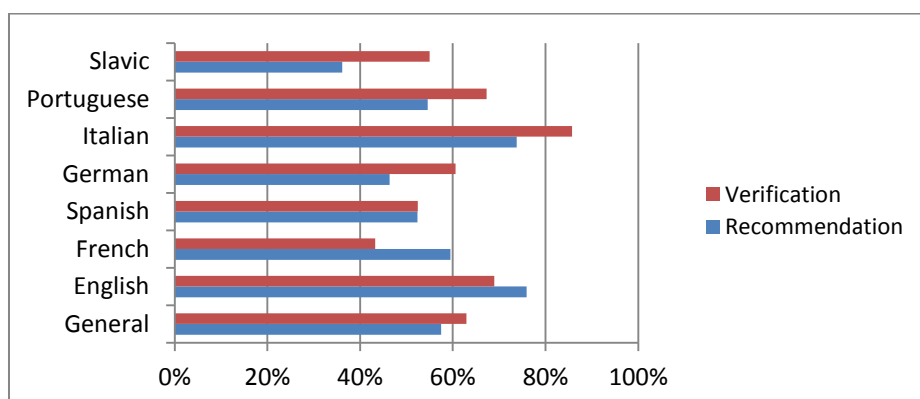
**Observation:** *Among native speakers of Italian, over 85% would like to see translators' associations verify claims about native speaker status. Among native speakers of French (PFIGS group), only 43% are in favor.*

**Sample comments**

*Answer: neither yes nor no. Depends on context and how it might be done. Difficult to do, but candidates can always be asked to specify their native speakers "on their honour" and be prepared to get booted out if there are complaints or if untruths emerge. Translators should, of course, sign their work – which straightens out a lot of the regulatory/verification/control issues right then and there. The translators clamoring to be able to work into a non-native language are often extremely reluctant to sign their work (and rightly so).*

How would you? Who would do the verifications? Peer-to-peer witch hunts? Harassment from sworn enemies? Permissiveness from friends? Where will the cutting line go? Who will define the requirements? As I have said, this is based on a false assumption so this is like trying to relieve pain by cutting off the leg.

*It would be impossible to police this, and certainly not a cost-effective use of Association resources. Self-reporting is not credible, and anything more than that is impractical. Most of the usual indicators people point to (educational degrees, residence "in-country", ethnic heritage, etc.) have never been adequately correlated to a definition of "educated native speaker", which is itself a problematic definition of a native translator. Each of those popular indicators has serious shortcomings. In the absence of a satisfactory definition of "native translator", associations should steer clear of trying to determine native competence. Once a definition of "native translator" is articulated, then research can begin identifying the indicators that can prove that status.*

That is too contentious and murky an issue at the moment for me. I've read the debates on the issue in some forums and can see how complicated the matter can be to define what a "native speaker" is, or even, in some countries, what constitutes a separate "language" (I did linguistic research documenting non-written languages and had a thorny problem drawing a line between "dialects" and "languages"). For informal purposes, a variety of definitions may work; but for formal purposes, such as an association verifying such status, I have not yet made up my mind since I have not yet seen satisfactory definitions of these terms. I get worried that the association would get bogged down in a morass of "exceptions" or that the individuals charged with such verification would have biases or inadequate definitions. However, I am also sick of seeing so many translators falsely claim they can translate competently into a non-native language and believe something should be done about it. I am eager to see how IAPTI addresses the issue.

*IF the association allows a translator to CLAIM through association materials, website, directory, etc. that he/she is a native speaker of any given language(s), then the association should be responsible for verification. IF NO CLAIM is made through any materials directly associated with the association, then it is really not the association's job to perform this type of watch-dog service.*

Yes, they should, but you will probably have a tough time selling this. I will join IAPTI if they do this.

*We are professionals. Associations should carefully study membership applications. Once a member you should be treated like a professional. No checking or verifying.*

Too many people overestimate their abilities in this field. They should have strong credentials (having lived more than 5 years in a country for instance).

*Too complicated to do, and too few people with the training and experience allowing them to do this.*

They should verify their translators credentials – all of them, not just their native speaker status.

*They should verify native LEVEL.*

There is no easy reliable way of doing this. The honor system will have to suffice.

*That's an interesting thought. How should associations handle this for speakers of languages for which there are not good proficiency tests?*

Yes, through a test translation.

*Tests for reading and writing competence are offered by various certification bodies. Translator associations may encourage their members to take these tests.*

No. Associations can issue certifications based on testing translators' skills, but it is not their business to verify any personal information of their members. The only focus should be a level of proficiency and ethical conduct of translators, and ethical business practices of agencies.

*Yes, of course, just for the sake of assuring their clients of their professionalism.*

Could be a very involved and complicated process. This is not the role of a translation association. I am involved with my local association (AUSIT), and this process would take up a lot of time and manpower.

*Well, they do, don't they? When registering/joining you have to state your A/B/C... language. So they know which one is your native language. But I think there are more pressing agendas for translation associations (see above) than to control in which directions their members are translating.*

Yes, by asking them to provide copies of degrees, cv, references, motivation letters.

*But they could verify ability, instead*

Yes, but exactly how native speaker status is to be verified is hard to say. Proz had a heated ten-mile long forum about it a couple of years ago. Consensus was not really achieved.

*Absolutely indispensable. They should also verify the expertise of the translator in their non-native language(s).*

I'm not sure how important translation associations are and what their influence is on the market, so I don't see this as being an issue.

## Q32. If you have any further comments about translating into a non-native language, please add them here.

*I applaud IAPTI for taking this on – this is EXACTLY the kind of real-world work associations should be doing. Our field is changing so quickly, we need more associations doing this – including syncing existing ethics and standards of practice to work on remote platforms, simultaneous in community settings, etc etc. Thank you!*

I've written before about the importance of translators and translation companies signing their work. Amazingly (but not really amazingly :-)) this cuts the bullshit factor dramatically. It also displaces a lot of the paranoia from non-native translators about "commercial forces keeping me from making a good living" since you can actually see who does what. Very healthy, that. And surely a wake-up call regarding work produced by everyone (including peers who claim expertise).

*It's fabulous that IAPTI is gathering survey results to come to a more informed position on this issue, thank you!*

This is an interesting question as there are very different and strongly-held attitudes about it in different places. I think it does affect the quality of a translation, but so does poor writing skills in a native speaker. Overconfidence and the lack of ability to judge the quality of one's work may lead less experienced translators to think they can produce quality work, especially if they are working into a language that is not spoken in their environment and have nothing to judge it against, and if poor quality work is accepted by clients. It's one part of a very complex puzzle.

*Nativeness is an important factor in translation and self-diagnosis is often optimistic, to judge from Proz forum posts. However, among customers, and many working translators, it has become something of a shibboleth and as a result its value is misunderstood.*

On the whole, I am against people translating into a non-native language. As a Spanish to English translator I have seen too many people attempt this too often and then run to forums for help, which I now refuse to give. They also usually undercut the prices of native speakers. However, I recognise that there are many language combinations in the world and there is not always a native speaker capable of doing the translation.

*Numerous times I have found the best method is to have a native speaker of each language work together...but that makes it more expensive.*

The valuation of a Native translator is an outdated myth that is reminiscent of racial stereotyping. And it works both ways – if a non native is given preference due to their birthplace then how is their professional ability valued? It isn't. And the standards fall lower and lower.

*The better you are, the more trepidation you feel.*

The longer I work as a translator, the more I learn how important it is to stick to translating into your native language and to fields where you feel comfortable.

## Cited references.

Several references were cited in the answers. Here is a collection of them:

*Charlie Bavington, http://cbavington.com/blog/2012/09/19/in-the-summertime/*

*Stuart Campbell, Translation into the second language, New York: Longman (1998)*

*Donald C. Kiraly, A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory to Practice, Routledge (2000)*

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*Forum thread on ProZ, Should native language claims be verified, www.proz.com/topic/227485*

*Karen Rueckert, The Native Speaker Principle and its Place in Legal Translation, www.juristische-uebersetzungen-rueckert.de/files/Inhalte/PDF/The%20native%20speaker%20principle%20and%20its%20place%20in%20legal%20translation.pdf*

*Daniel Šebesta, Native speaker status in the translation services market, Lambert Academic Publishing (2013)*