From unrestricted access to pencil and paper: Evaluating machine translation post-editing in translation classes

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Abstract

The effort to adapt translation programmes to the rapid development of machine translation (MT) most commonly manifests itself in the introduction of new content into the curriculum, specifically machine translation post-editing (MTPE). Yet, students use available MT technology even in seminars focused on traditional (not MTPE) translation. Considering this development, a survey was carried out within the European Master's in Translation network in autumn 2022. The research covered both actual instruction/ exams in translation courses and final exams. This article assesses the respondents' answers (a quantitative approach) and reviews the comments of respondents (a qualitative approach). The results show that most translation seminars cover MTPE to a limited extent only. During instruction, the most common way to track MT use is for students to supply a commentary with their translations. The prevailing attitude towards MT in examinations involved no ban being imposed on MT usage or students were not discouraged from using it. If, however, MT was explicitly banned in the course, the ban was more likely to be enforced during exams rather than in actual instruction during seminars. The article concludes with an outlook of future developments predicting a more pronounced blending of MT use and MTPE in dedicated classes.

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1.   Introduction

The advent of automation in non-literary translation has been gradual. It started gaining popularity in the 1990s with the introduction of Computer-Aided/Assisted Translation technology (CAT) using the principle of translation memories. This technology was then combined with terminology management, file management, search functions, and quality control functions; however, translation memory technology can be primarily applied to texts that exhibit a certain degree of repetition – whether within a single document (intratextual repetitiveness) or across texts (intertextual repetitiveness) (Rothwell et al. 2023). This technology will be less useful in non-repetitive texts; perhaps for generating matches at a lower level than a segment (subsegment matching), using concordance search (full-text searches of translation memory and source/target text), or searching in a predefined terminology database that may be part of the project. If a text that is being translated does not show a sufficient degree of correspondence with previously translated segments or their parts, these systems will not offer a comprehensive pre-translated text and the user translates anew, in their own words, from scratch.

This concept, however, has changed profoundly since around 2006 with the development and extension of the machine translation (MT) systems, when a commercial MT engine appeared on the scene, becoming the most popular one for the next couple of years – Google Translate (Schmidhofer and Mair 2018, 166). MT systems produce language material in the target language whether or not the translation memory technologies are used. In other words, if a CAT tool–user turns on the MT function in a project, a version (although not final) of a translation will always be produced. Recently, the quality of widely available MT systems has improved significantly, especially thanks to the use of neural networks and deep learning technologies that incorporate artificial intelligence (cf. Rothwell et al. 2023). In this context, machine translation post-editing (MTPE) – where a machine-translated text is then revised by an editor (post-editor) to provide a text that meets the quality requirements – has been increasingly employed.

Institutions responsible for the education of future translators cannot overlook this trend and many included the new technologies in their study programmes several years ago (see Rothwell and Svoboda 2019). For some time, translation and translation technologies were taught separately[1], leading to situations where students acquired translation competence independently of technological competence (for the specified competencies,

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[1] In these classes, they usually also focus on the wider use of MT, such as data confidentiality and other ethical aspects.

see EMT Competence Framework 2022[2]). This also seems to have been changing, recently[3]; at several institutes within the EMT network some assignments in technical translation courses are carried out using specific CAT software.

Even though MTPE is being increasingly incorporated– in existing translation courses or with the introduction of specific MTPE-oriented courses – representatives of translation-oriented programmes insist on cultivating translation competence (see below for survey results).

Although translation instructors do not seem to oppose the enhancement of post-editing competence, they require the two (MTPE and translation) to be covered separately, which can be justified (see Rico and Gonzales Pastor 2022). Insisting on deepening translation competence is necessary, as technical problems (such as a translator being offline) or reasons related to professional ethics (such as a ban on passing on the original to a third party) may hinder the use of MT services. Additionally, the first competence a post-editor should possess according to the international post-editing standard (ČSN ISO 18587) is *translation competence* (see section 5. Competences and Qualifications of Post-editors). For further information, see the comments section of the survey below.

However, a problem arises when students do not translate the text in their own words (interactive translation), but "employ MT despite warnings not do so" as part of translation-oriented assignments or courses (Salinas and Burbat 2023, 243). Even greater difficulties emerge when it comes to examination at the end of a course or at the end of the entire degree programme, which is supposed to test the translation competence, and it turns out that a student did not create the text by translating it traditionally, but by using MT as a basis and post-editing it.[4] In such cases, strategic decisions need to be made, and there are a number of approaches to choose from, ranging from not considering it as a method of translation to requiring translations without the use of any computing technology (simply using pen and paper).

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[2] Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/news/updated-version-emt-competence-framework-now--available-2022-10-21_en (accessed: 9 May 2023).

[3] Unaware of published studies focusing on this trend, we draw upon our experience and personal conversations with representatives of study programmes or interviews with translation lecturers.

[4] Based on the experience of the professors at ITS and at other EMT member institutes, there have been cases when a student received a better mark in a translation course for what was most likely a post-edited text than for a text translated without using MT, e.g., when translating into an L2 language. (Source: personal conversations with professors).

To learn the strategies of different translation institutes in this field, a survey was conducted, the results of which are presented below in the Findings section.[5] The preceding sections are dedicated to defining terminology, the summary of previous research in the relevant area, and to the methodology applied in the research. At the end of the article, research findings, limitations, and future outlook are presented.

In this article, "translation" or "human translation" denotes a translation created by a human from scratch, without the use of MT (this includes translations created with specific CAT tools). By "CAT tools", we refer to computer-assisted translation in its narrow sense: specific systems based primarily on translation memory technology, not to all the situations when a computer is used during the translation process. In this narrow sense, the term CAT is thus strictly distinguished from the term machine translation (MT). We use the term "MT" (machine translation) to describe systems (MT engines) that automatically generate linguistic material in the target language based on the text input in the source language. Unless stated otherwise, these include generic MT engines, such as Google Translate or DeepL.[6] By "MTPE", we refer to a machine-translated text that was edited by a human in line with the definition in the ČSN ISO 18587 standard: to post-edit is to "edit and proofread the *output of machine translation*" (ČSN ISO 18587 2021: 7).[7]

This article discusses translation, not interpreting. Its primary focus is on non-literary/technical translation, not literary translation. When it comes to MT, we set aside hybrid MT systems and their possibilities of user customization or programming/training. Regarding translation technologies, only computer-assisted translation (CAT) and machine translation (MT) are the focus here, which means the role of technology in such fields as audiovisual translation or localization is not considered. Product quality is referred to when discussing evaluation.

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[5] This article is a revised and expanded version of Svoboda and Schwarz (2023).

[6] Chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) and their functions are not examined in this article.

[7] This is to mean regardless of the environment in which the post-editing takes place. We decided to use a definition that goes beyond the one dictated by the ČSN ISO 17100 standard: There, the term to "post-edit" refers to "edit and proofread the output of machine translation [...] It does not apply to the situation when a translator sees and uses a solution provided by an MT engine in a computer-assisted translation (CAT) system" (ČSN ISO 17100 2015: 9).

2.   State of research in the field

In this section, outline the current state of research in the observed area is outlined. First, a brief overview is provided of the academic literature on the topic of technology in translation and the use of such technology in translator training. Subsequently, this section focuses on the issue of MTPE in relation to translator training, with an emphasis on translation examinations.

One of the most recent publications on the topic of technology in translation with a broad picture in mind is Rothwell et al. (2023). As for MT/MTPE, Kenny (2022) or Nitzke and Hansen-Shirra (2021) are valuable sources including the secondary literature they refer to.

In the field of translation technology research (in English) related to translator training, Bowker (2014), Gaspari et al. (2015), Mellinger (2017), Shuttleworth (2017), Stasimioti and Sosoni (2019), and Kenny (2019) have been influential. Possible approaches to MT, specifically neural machine translation (NMT), are presented by Massey and Ehrenberger-Dow (2017), exploring the process of deep learning in connection with MT. In addition to mapping the development of NMT and the professional approach to it, the article also includes a section on potential implications for translator training. The authors point out that students should be aware of the limitations of MT, and, for example, ergonomic risks associated with using these systems.[8] Moreover, they consider it crucial for students to recognise the added value of human translation, such as intercultural communication.

The integration of machine translation and terminology management tools into practical translation courses is advocated by Mellinger (2017). In line with our standpoint, he argues that separation of these areas is undesirable and results in translation and MT-related skills not being connected (see also Massey and Ehrenberger-Dow 2017 or Kenny 2019). Evaluation in specialized translation classes is one of the topics of Klabal and de la Fuente Marina (2023).

The article by Rico and González Pastor (2022) addresses the position of educators on integrating MT in translator training. The article raises questions about how MT can be most effectively utilised in translation instruction and what skills students acquire when working with these systems. The respondents mostly leaned towards the opinion that students should expand their knowledge of MT, as they consider it beneficial for the quality of their classes. According to them, students should be prepared for MT post-editing, and MT should be viewed in a more holistic way, not solely as a working tool; the approach to teaching MT should consider the realities of the job market.

In Kenny's text (2019), the importance of interconnecting translation skills and technological competence is highlighted, with relevant integration

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[8] On this subject, see also Svoboda (2018).

strategies being specified. The author points out that, epistemologically, translators learn with, from, and through machines. Once again, we encounter the viewpoint that translators should be mindful of the added value of human translation and be capable of delivering it. The text emphasizes the necessity of adapting to the demands of the job market and the reflection on ethical issues in general.

In the article by Schmidhofer and Mair (2018), we learn about the results of an experiment conducted in two translation courses within the context of translator training in Austria.[9] Students who used DeepL saved time but were unsure about the quality of the translation outputs. Students who did not use the MT engine worked more "reflectively". Students who translated into their L2 language made fewer grammatical errors when working with the MT engine.[10]

Guerberof Arenas and Moorkens (2019) present the structure of the MTPE course at the University of Barcelona. The authors arrive at an interesting insight that greater familiarity with MT and its functions reduces risk of frustration. They also add that scepticism among students regarding MT diminishes over time and is linked to their experiences with online MT engines. In conclusion, the authors recommend enhancing students' skills in creative writing as well as project management.[11]

Although unrelated to our MTPE scenario, Huertas-Barros and Vine's paper (2019) is relevant here, because it covers, among other things, tutors' perceptions of assessment practices in translation pedagogy. The authors make an important pledge for "assessment literacy among the staff" of a translation course (p. 264), an objective also sought after by this present article.

Based on the available academic literature, it becomes evident that the specific topic of using MT in exams is either not covered at all or only marginally. Below, we will discuss the approach of our present research and its findings.

3.   Methodology

The basis for collecting data was a poll launched in the autumn of 2022 and entitled *Survey Among EMT Institutes on Practices in Translation Examinations*, the purpose of which was to investigate the practices when it comes to (dis)allowing MT in translation examinations. Respondents were

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[9] A similar experiment was also conducted by Esqueda (2021).

[10] On the issue of translation into foreign language, see also Duběda, Mraček, and Obdržálková (2018).

[11] Other relevant sources include Depraetere (2010), Opalková (2018), Varela Salinas (2020), and Zappatore (2022). Otherwise, we set aside more detailed studies about translation technologies (CAT tools, MT, etc.), as well as specific issues related to translation pedagogy.

required to be instructors of a practical translation course or persons involved in final, graduation examinations that include a translation exercise.

The online survey was based on Google Forms, and it consisted of three sections (see attachment). The first section collected information about the respondent, their institution, and their roles. The second section invited respondents to describe their experience with using MT during the course's final examinations. They could provide comments on topics in the third section. There was a total of ten questions, including Yes/No/Do not know–questions, multiple-choice questions, and a comment section.

A call to fill out the survey was sent to the email addresses of representatives from all EMT member institutes (68 institutions at that time), 48 responses were received.[12] Several individuals from one and the same institution could respond if their roles differed, which was the case of six institutions. Nine respondents chose the anonymous response mode ("Prefer not to specify"). Therefore, we estimate that, based on the institutions, the response rate was approximately 36 institutes (53%). Data collection, organised by the ITS, took place from 6 September to 30 September 2022, and the results were presented during the EMT conference in Prague at the end of October 2022.

The poll was structured to distinguish responses related to overall final examinations and those pertinent to a translation course. Specifically, in Question 2, respondents could either choose the role of an institute or answer on behalf of a translation course. The survey branched further from Question 7 where a distinction was made between the approach a respondent applied to technology during examinations (both final examinations and specific translation course examinations), as opposed to their approach during the ongoing instruction in course sessions.

For clarity, pie charts are used to show the results. The charts also include the number of received responses (N indicator).

This survey did not consider MTPE courses because the sole goal was to gain insight into courses focusing on the development of translation competence. If MTPE is taught in a translation course, it is relevant to our survey only in as far as the activities related to this topic do not constitute the majority of the course's curriculum. The research focused solely on MA courses.[13] Furthermore, some outcomes of discussions to this effect, which took place the Institute of Translation Studies (ITS) within Charles University's Faculty of Arts, are incorporated here, too.

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[12] The EMT (European Master's in Translation) network is a partnership project between the European Commission and institutions with MA programmes in translation. To join this network, an institution needs to demonstratively provide high-quality translator training.

[13] The respondents could provide more information, e.g., about BA courses, in the comment fields at the end of the survey.

After presenting the data collection method, including the poll structure, the following sections will focus on the obtained data and its interpretation.

4.   Findings

In Question 1, respondents were asked for the name of the institution they represent (their affiliation). These are some of the universities whose representatives participated non-anonymously in the survey: of University Antwerp, Université libre de Bruxelles, TH Köln – University of Applied Sciences, University of Lille, Leipzig University, KU Leuven, University of Ljubljana, UNINT – International University of Rome, University of Turku, University of Vienna, Vilnius University, and others.

The second question aimed at determining whether the respondent is responsible for the whole institute (translator training facility) or a translation course only. Out of the 48 entries obtained, responses related to an institute ("I am responding on behalf of my institute") represented approximately 17%; the remaining majority (83%) consisted of responses focusing on translation courses.

Question 3 was worded as follows:

If your institute has final examinations in place (on completion of the studies), do you employ a different strategy as regards technology usage in those examinations compared to specific translation course examinations?

The answers suggest that most institutes (almost 53%) apply the same approach to the use of translation technologies during final exams on completion of the studies as during specific translation course examinations. For better understanding, we provide the percentage rates of the responses (including Do not know–responses) in the chart below:
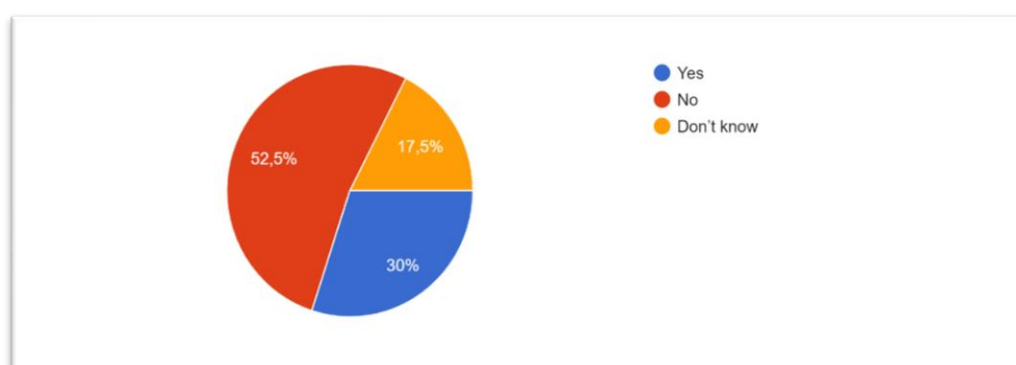

Figure 1. The employment of a different (Yes) or identical strategy (No) as regards technology usage during final examinations (on

completion of the studies) or specific translation course examinations (N=40 responses)

Based on **Question 4,** respondents were divided into two groups: they were asked to select whether their responses cover final examinations or specific translation course examinations. (*My responses below will cover the following: • final examinations; • specific translation course examinations*)
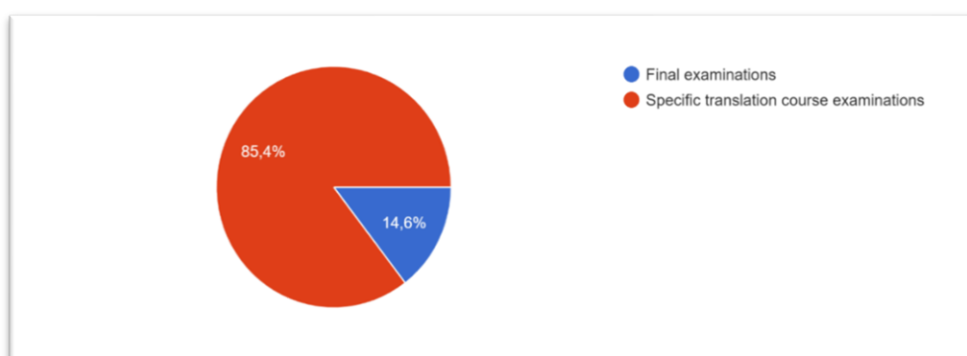

Figure 2. The ratio of respondents providing responses related to final exams (on completion of the studies) compared to responses related to specific translation course examinations (N=48 responses)

The chart suggests that the vast majority (over 85%) of responses to the following questions will cover specific translation courses rather than final exams.[15]

The **following question** addresses the role of MTPE more broadly and is worded as follows: *Do you cover MTPE (machine translation post-editing) in your translation class?*
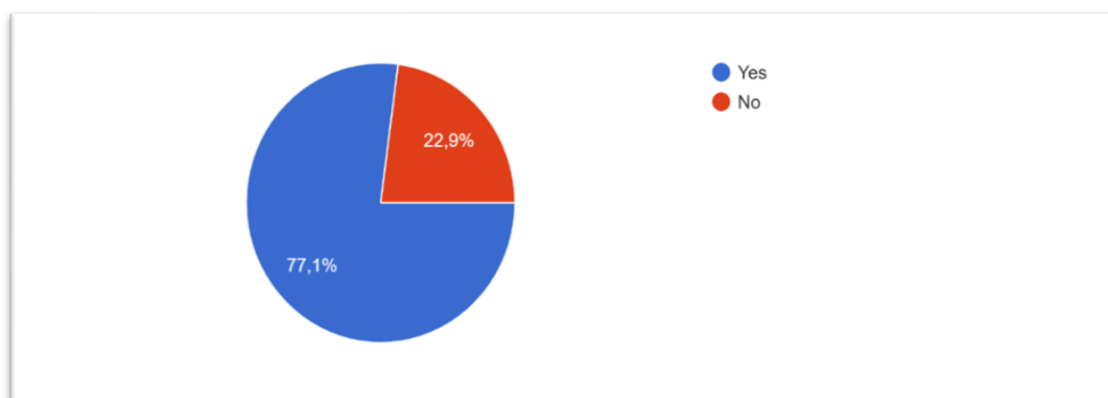

Figure 3. Incorporation of MTPE into translator training courses (N=48 responses)

It is evident that the majority (77%) of translation courses dealt with MTPE-related issues.[14] Less than a quarter of respondents indicated that the course they represent did not include MTPE. This, however, does not imply that the institutions participating in the survey do not, in addition to translation courses, offer courses that are exclusively focused on post-editing. This statistic primarily reflects that, in most cases, if a translation course is offered in a study programme, a component of MTPE is already incorporated. The number of courses with a predominant MTPE component was not surveyed here.

Question 6 follows up on the previous question: *"If so* [If you deal with the issue of MTPE in translation courses]*, what is the ratio of MTPE compared to 'traditional' (human) translation (HT) assignments? (Approximate values; if MTPE represents more than 50 %, your course is regarded as an MTPE course, thus not relevant for this survey.)"*
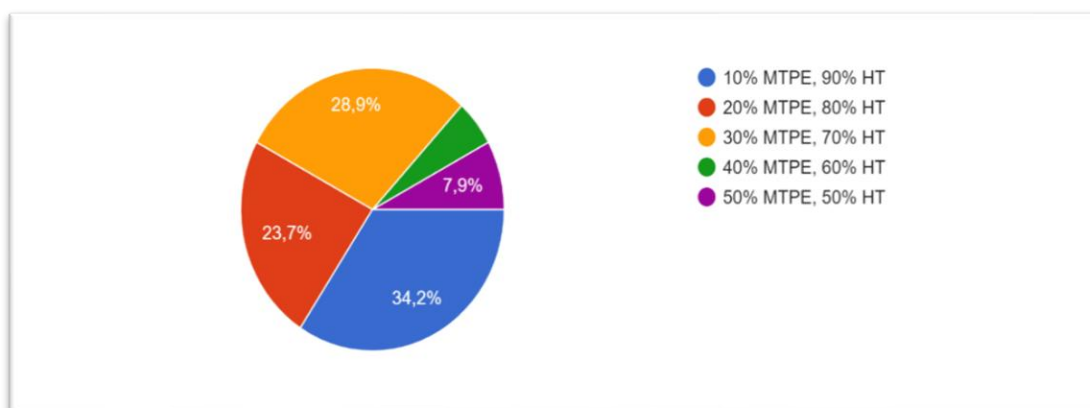

Figure 4. The ratio of MTPE assignments compared to 'traditional' (human) translation assignments in translation courses (N=38 responses)

From the distribution of responses, it is evident that the majority (34%) of primarily translation-oriented courses incorporate MTPE to the least extent (approximately 10% of assignments are dedicated to post-editing while the rest is devoted to regular translation). The following two rates (around 20% and 30% of assignments involving MTPE compared to human translation) are represented quite similarly (24% and 29%, respectively), and relatively few respondents (two responses [5%] and three responses [8%], respectively) chose one of the next two rates (40% and 50% of tasks incorporating MTPE). Thus, in 87% of the translation courses combined MTPE exercises cover up to 30% of the tasks assigned. Scenarios with comparable attention being paid to post-editing and human translation are rare, with just under 8% of the courses.

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[14] To distinguish a course focusing on translation from a course focusing primarily on MTPE, see the following question.

From Question 7 onwards, the respondents had to divide their responses as regards technology usage in the examinations as opposed to technology usage in actual course sessions (see below for the latter). It was worded as follows: "Please describe the role of MT (machine translation) in your examinations." Respondents had three options to choose from:

  – No ban on MT. No restrictions on the use of technology (students are free to use any MT engine if they wish; they are examined on the quality of their final translation, regardless of the involvement of technology)
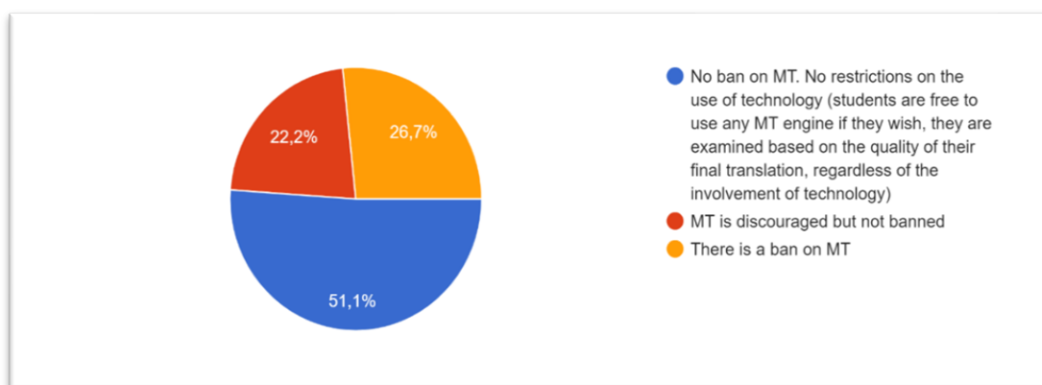 – MT is discouraged but not banned
  – There is a ban on MT

Figure 5. The use of MT in examinations: non-restricted, or banned? (N=45 responses)

The results show that in more than a half of the courses (51.1%), the use of MT is not restricted during examinations, with the assessment focusing solely on the final text, regardless of the technological tools and resources used to arrive at it. In more than a quarter of the cases (26.7%), the use of MT is prohibited during examinations. In the remaining cases, MT is not prohibited, but its usage is not recommended. It can be concluded that students in nearly 75% of the observed translation courses have the option to use MT during final examinations.15

The next question (7A) follows-up on examination strategies during exams: If you selected "MT is discouraged but not banned" or "There is a ban on MT", please choose an option that describes the way MT usage is tracked in your examinations:

  – Respondents had nine responses to choose from:

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15 We did not survey the respondents for any further details regarding the examinations (types of texts, quality requirements, types of performance).

- Students' translations are manually compared to generic NMT engine renderings (such as DeepL or Google Translate)
- Antiplagiarism software used to detect MT usage
- Students comment on their translation strategies either in a separate essay (incl. extra time allowance) or as part of a subsequent consultation
- Choice of content that is difficult to render by an MT engine (proven to generate MT-induced errors)
- Choice of a non-editable original (either non-editable pdf or other graphic format or a hard copy in on-site scenarios)
- Controlled environment: keyboard logging, screen recording, checking browser history
- Use of a PC that is off-line
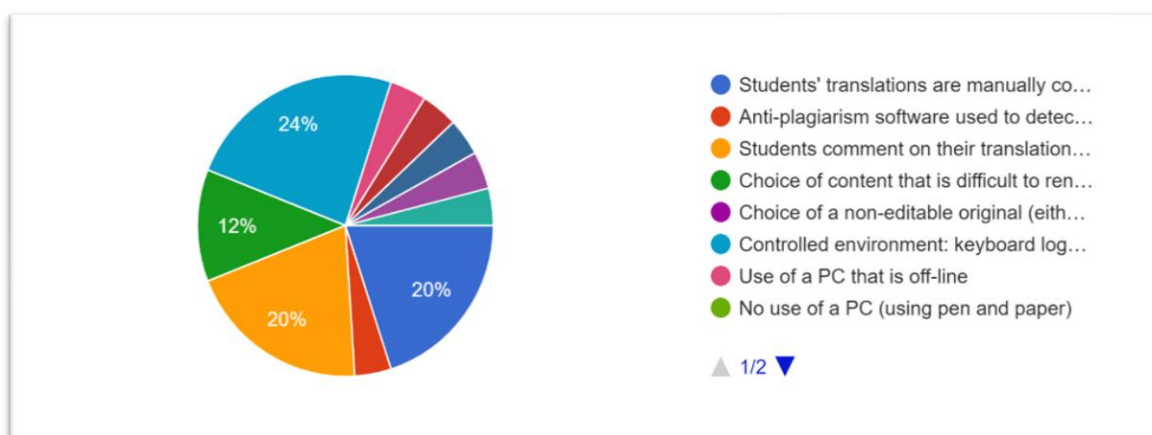- No use of a PC (using pen and paper)
- Other…16

Figure 6. Strategies to control and track MT-usage during examinations (N=25 responses)

The results captured in Chart 6 suggest that the most common strategy of preventing the usage of machine translation (25%) is conducting exams in a controlled environment (as mentioned above) in which students are not allowed to use NMT. A frequently used strategy is comparing student translations with those generated by commonly available MT engines (e.g., DeepL or Google Translate). Another common strategy (21%) is the requirement for students to comment on their translation strategies. The least often used strategy involves a source text that is difficult to render by an MT engine, thus provenly producing errors.

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16 Other measures may include blocking access to certain websites on university computers.

In Question 8, we followed up on the distinction presented in the seventh question (where the option for responding in regard to technology usage in examinations or regarding technology usage in actual course sessions was introduced), collecting responses about strategies during course sessions. The question was worded as follows:

If you employ a different strategy as regards the role of MT during the course sessions compared to the examinations (e.g., banning MT in the exam, but allowing it during the course), please specify it here. Otherwise, please select "The same strategy as in exams"

Regarding different perspectives on the usage of MT during course sessions, the question offered three options to choose from, same as Question 7: No ban on MT; MT is discouraged but not banned; There is a ban on MT.
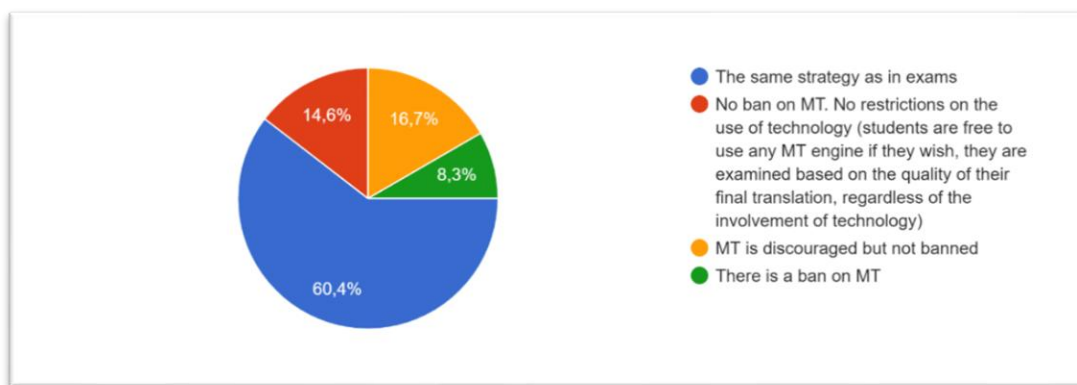

Figure 7. Approaches to MT during course sessions vs. examinations (N=48 responses)

Most respondents (60%) chose the option where their approach to the use of MT during course sessions was the same as in exams. In other cases (the following results exclude the answer "The same strategy as in exams"), the use of MT during courses was discouraged but not banned (42% of the remaining sample), MT is not banned at all (37%) or there is a ban on MT (21%).17

The last quantitatively oriented question – 8A – was structured similarly to Question 7A, focusing on strategies during actual course sessions. It was worded as follows:

If you selected "MT is discouraged but not banned" or "There is a ban on MT", please choose an option that best describes the way MT usage is tracked in your course sessions:

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17 The following results exclude the answer "The same strategy as in exams".

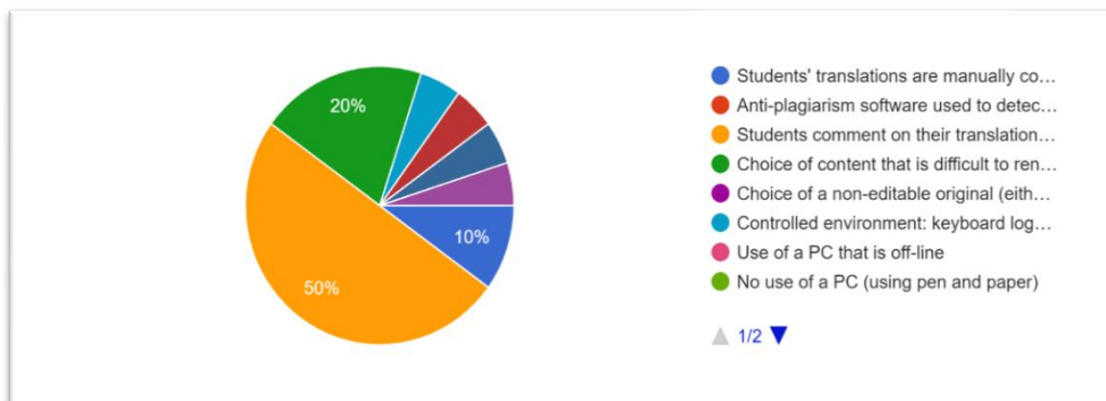Respondents could choose from the same set of options as in Question 7A.

Figure 8. Strategies to control and track MT usage during course sessions (N=20 responses)

The most common way to control the use of MT during course sessions is the requirement for students to comment on their translation strategies. In every fifth case, the use of MT is prevented by selecting a text (content) that is difficult to render by an MT engine. In 10% of cases, students' translations are manually compared to generic NMT engine renderings.

As regards the comments filled out under the last question (Question 9: "Please take a moment to share best practices that you think could be relevant to other EMT institutes / courses involved or add any other comment, e.g., on practices in BA-level translation courses"), we provide a summary of insightful responses below.18

The use of MT and MTPE during examinations is a 'hotly debated topic' in some institutes. The approach in BA translation courses (in terms of MT being introduced or not, differences can usually be observed even between academic years within BA programmes) may differ from MA courses (distinctions are sometimes made between semesters). Lecturers' approaches are not uniform, even within the same institution. Often, the approach to the use of MT/MTPE depends on the decision of the instructor.

Regarding the issue of skills and disposition, an opinion has emerged, again in the comments section of Question 9, that if a person does not have sufficient translation skills and intuition, they will not be able to fully make use of MT's potential. Some respondents also pointed out that students

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18 The survey ends with Question 10 where the respondents were asked about their identity and contact details in case they were open for further exchanges. During the EMT 2022 conference in Prague, the results of the survey were presented, and two respondents were invited to share their experience with the topic.

need to fully master traditional translation before they start using machine translation; however, translation skills should be developed alongside available translation technologies, rather than separately. Lecturers are aware of potential problems with this approach, for instance, a situation where a translator overly relies on MT (MT priming). It is crucial for students to be able to explain the decisions they make during the post-editing process.

In some institutions, MT is prohibited in exams as a matter of principle (university-level measures), and students are provided with the topic two weeks before the exam to prepare. Terminological resources can be used in print during the exam. In other cases, instructors ask students beforehand if they want to use MT during exams, and the response is usually affirmative. The instructor then provides the source text, which is roughly 20% longer than the original text intended for traditional translation (this is an estimated compensation for efficiency gained through post-editing for text types under scrutiny in that particular seminar). An interesting observation is that the use of MT in exams has led to a reduction in the diversity of results: grades more often fall in the middle of the rating scale, suggesting that this method reduces the occurrence of very poor as well as very good translations.

Another respondent mentioned a practice where students work on translation or post-editing tasks in groups of up to three and collaborate on editing one document shared on cloud storage. Subsequently, they present different strategies they used and how they arrived at the final wording. In other cases, students first translate the text without using MT, and then the result is compared with the MT renderings. Translations produced by different MT engines are often compared in seminars. The result of such an approach is that the use of MT becomes transparent and is thus placed on par with common translation tools such as corpora or CAT tools. The opinion that technology is an important part of our work but makes students more passive, unable to develop their own skills to the fullest, appeared several times in our survey. 19

Finally, let us summarise various approaches to translation course examinations based on the options in the questionnaire and provide additional insights from respondents in the survey's comments section or, beyond the survey, from discussions at the Institute of Translation Studies.

5. Discussion

The survey yielded 48 respondents from among EMT universities. Most respondents answered questions from the perspective of implementing specific teaching methods and student assessments, not

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19 One of the respondents describes the situation rather bluntly: "MT makes students lazy."

from the perspective of the entire institution. If final exams are required at the end of the study programme, the approach to the use of translation technologies is generally the same as in exams at the end of individual courses. Most responses to questions 5, 6, 8, and 8A relate to specific translation courses rather than final exams.

It appears that a significant majority (77%) of the observed translation-focused courses take into account the issue of MTPE, but they do so to a limited extent, with only 34% of them having a very low (10% of MTPE assignments) to low (20–30% of MTPE assignments, applies to 53% courses) percentage of such assignments. [20] This suggests that the issue of MTPE has only begun making its way into courses at the time of the survey and the observed institutions. One way of explaining this finding is that a study programme with training in translation technologies might have been covering them outside of a translation course. Similarly, MT technology may have been considered less relevant for potential graduates' future paths.

Regarding course examination, in slightly over half of the represented courses, the use of MT is not prohibited, and only the final text is assessed irrespective of the technological tools used. In more than a quarter of cases (26.7%), however, MT is prohibited during exams. This ban is likely intended to primarily test the translation skills of students as opposed to their MTPE skills.

If teachers or institutions decide to prevent the use of MT during examinations, the most common method (in 25% of cases) is to conduct exams in a controlled environment, where, for example, keystrokes are monitored, or the screen is recorded. Another frequently used method is to compare student translations with renderings generated by commonly available NMT engines, or to require students to comment on their own translations.

In the survey, we compared the way MT/MTPE is handled in examinations with that in course sessions. The comparison shows that in most cases (60%), the approaches to the use of MT in class and during exams do not differ. If an institution has a different view on the matter, though, the use of MT is generally discouraged in courses (although not prohibited – 42%), and not prohibited at all in 37% of the courses; at the same time, it is prohibited in 21% of the courses. This ratio is slightly stricter for course examination: MT is banned in almost 27% of the cases. The most common way to reflect or prevent the use of MT/MTPE in a course is to have students to provide a commentary on their translation solutions (50%), while in the case of examinations, it is to conduct exams in a controlled environment (as mentioned above).

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[20] We did not consider if the specific institution has an ongoing course focusing on MTPE.

This chart sums up the different approaches of (not) using MT in translation course examinations. It plots the unrestricted approach on the left side; it captures the practice where students are not allowed to use electronic aids during examinations, working with pen and paper on the far-right side of the scale.

This is not an exhaustive list of possible strategies; rather, it is an attempt to illustrate different tendencies and the degree of restrictions using graphic representation within a certain continuum. Those responsible for curriculum development of specific courses or study programmes can thus reflect where their approach lies in the presented chart. The chart can also serve to more vividly present alternatives regarding the restriction of MT in course sessions.
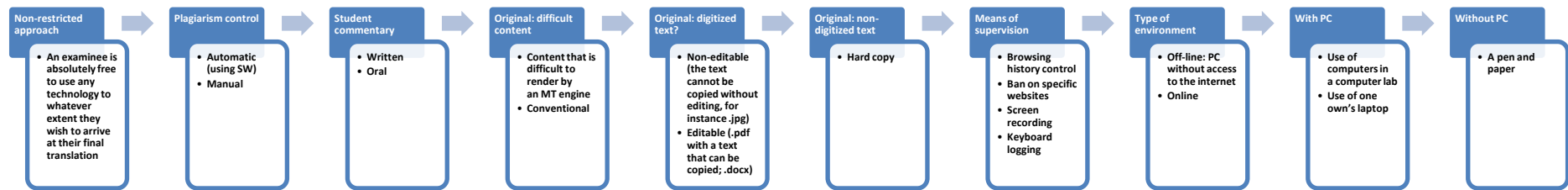
Liberal approach (unrestricted approach, permission to use technology).

Fully restricted approach (an examinee can use a pen and paper only).

Picture 1. Scale of approaches to translation course examinations vis-à-vis MT usage

6.   Research Limitations and Future Outlook

In view of the target audience (a specific European network of study programs comprising 68 institutions at the time of the survey), the present study does not claim general validity, despite the approximately 53% response rate. A limitation associated with this target group is that the network presents itself as a platform uniting study programmes of high qualitative standards, implying certain qualitative emphases that may not be met by other study programmes.[21] Additionally, the survey reflects the situation in 2022, but considering the dynamic development of translation technology, the processes surveyed may have already changed. For methodological reasons, the research is restricted to courses with a prevailing translation component (50% or more compared to MTPE), and therefore, cases where study programmes may offer courses primarily focused on post-editing are not considered here.

Regarding future outlook, related research by A. Rothwell, J. Moorkens, and T. Svoboda (2025) suggests that the representatives of study programmes expect growing involvement of translation technologies in translation courses.[22] They also intend to cover additional technology tools in their classes. The Institute of Translation Studies has linked practical translation courses with the use of translation technologies and promoted language-specific training of MTPE. As for the area of interest addressed in this article, the ITS recently decided that MT will be explicitly prohibited in final exams until post-editing becomes an integral part of the curriculum, and thus also of final exams, under accreditation criteria. To enforce this restriction, state exams take place in the computer lab. The equipment allows the examiner to toggle the input signal on a dedicated PC monitor, viewing, in real time, individual students' screens. The examinees will have been informed of this arrangement, and the examiner may or may not make use of this proctoring measure. According to internal consultation within the faculty's departments, this procedure, unlike many others, is GDPR-compliant as no recording of personal data (such as students' log-in details) takes place.

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[21] The stated ambitions and conditions for admission to the EMT network are described on its website: "The European Master's in Translation is a quality label for MA university programs in translation. The DGT awards it to higher education programs that meet agreed professional standards and market demands." Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/resources-partners/european-masters-translation-emt/european-masters-translation-emt-explained_en (accessed on May 25, 2023, italics by T.S.). The emphasis on modern technologies in translation is also one of the evaluation criteria when granting EMT membership.

[22] To a certain extent, the target group was different from the present research.

7.   Summary

The results presented here from research conducted among higher education translation institutes stem from recent developments in translation technologies, especially machine translation, which have forced these institutions to deal with the impacts of their expanding influence. In this context, we focused on whether, and to what extent, these institutions restrict the use of this technology in classes or exams of practical translation courses.

Overall, it is evident that the representation of MT/MTPE in translation-focused courses is relatively low. In classes, the strategy of students writing a commentary on their translation is often selected, thus revealing whether students opted for a reflective strategy in translation and to what extent they used MT. In exams, we witnessed a relatively liberal approach, where the use of MT is not prohibited in slightly more than half of the cases, nor are students discouraged from using it. However, if there is a ban on the use of MT in a course, it is more often enforced in exams than in regular course sessions.

From responses in the comments section, it was clear that the observed issue is a topic of lively discussion in institutions surveyed. Therefore, it will be appropriate to monitor future trends in this area.

Acknowledgment

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Annex: Questionnaire used in the survey

Sekce 1 z 3

Survey among EMT institutes on practices in translation examinations

This poll is open from now on until September 30th.

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for participating in this survey. Responding to it will take no more than just a few minutes.

The purpose of this exercise is to survey the practice in EMT member institutes when it comes to **(dis)allowing machine translation (MT) in translation examinations**. The respondent should be a lecturer of a practical translation course and/or a person involved in final (graduation) examinations if these include a translation exercise.

For this poll, courses **specialising** in MTPE (Machine translation post-editing) are **not** relevant as it is only courses focussed on developing **translation skills** specifically that we intend to survey here. If you teach a **translation course** including an **MTPE component**, it will be relevant for this poll, only if MTPE is not a pre-dominant course feature.

In **Question 2**, you will be able to choose either an **INSTITUTIONAL** approach or **COURSE** level. Should you choose the **institutional** approach, please still make sure to respond to '**course**'-related questions, while trying to describe a predominant/typical practice in your institute as a whole (pars-pro-toto approach).

The survey covers post-graduate (MA-level) courses only. Additional information, e.g., on BA-level courses, can be provided in the comments section at the end of the questionnaire.

Results of this survey will be presented at the October EMT Network meeting in Prague.
Thank you in advance for your kind collaboration

Tomáš Svoboda, Institute of Translation Studies, Charles University, Prague

1. Name of Institute *
 Prefer not to specify
 Jiná…

2. I am responding on behalf of: *
 My institute
 A translation course

3. If your institute has **final examinations** in place (on completion of the **studies**), do you employ a different strategy as regards technology usage in those examinations compared to **specific translation course examinations**?
 Yes
 No
 Don't know

4. My responses below will cover the following: *
 Final examinations
 Specific translation course examinations

5. Do you cover MTPE (machine translation post-editing) in your translation class? *
 Yes
 No

6. If so, what is the ratio of MTPE compared to 'traditional' (human) translation (HT) assignments? (Approximate values)
(If MTPE represents more than 50%, your course is regarded as an MTPE course, thus not relevant for this survey.)
 10% MTPE, 90% HT
 20% MTPE, 80% HT
 30% MTPE, 70% HT
 40% MTPE, 60% HT
 50% MTPE, 50% HT

Po sekci 1
Pokračovat na další sekci
Sekce 2 z 3
EXAMS AND COURSES

Popis (nepovinný)

EXAMS
Please note: Below a distinction is made between your strategy as regards technology usage in either the **examinations** or actual **course sessions**.

7. Please describe the **role of MT** (machine translation) in your **EXAMINATIONS**:
  No ban on MT. No restrictions on the use of technology (students are free to use any MT engine if they wish, they are examined based on the quality of their final translation, regardless of the involvement of technology)
  MT is discouraged but not banned
  There is a ban on MT

7(A). If you selected "MT is discouraged but not banned" or "There is a ban on MT", please choose an option that best describes the way **MT usage is tracked** in your **EXAMINATIONS**:
  Students' translations are manually compared to generic MT engine renderings (such as DeepL or Google Translate)
  Anti-plagiarism software used to detect MT usage
  Students comment on their translation strategies either in a separate essay (incl. extra time allowance) or as part of a subsequent consultation
  Choice of content that is difficult to render by an MT engine (will provenly generate MT-induced errors)
  Choice of a non-editable original (either non-editable pdf or other graphic format or a hard copy in on-site scenarios)
  Controlled environment: keyboard logging, screen recording, checking browser history
  Use of a PC that is off-line
  No use of a PC (using pen and paper)
  Jiná…

COURSES

8. If you employ a **different strategy** as regards the **role of MT** during the **COURSE SESSIONS** compared to the examinations (e.g., banning

MT in the exam, but allowing it during the course), please specify it here. Otherwise, please select "The same strategy as in exams" *

The same strategy as in exams
No ban on MT. No restrictions on the use of technology (students are free to use any MT engine if they wish, they are examined based on the quality of their final translation, regardless of the involvement of technology)
MT is discouraged but not banned
There is a ban on MT

8(A). If you selected "MT is discouraged but not banned" or "There is a ban on MT", please choose an option that best describes the way **MT usage is tracked** in your **COURSE SESSIONS**:
Students' translations are manually compared to generic MT engine renderings (such as DeepL or Google Translate)
Anti-plagiarism software used to detect MT usage
Students comment on their translation strategies either in a separate essay (incl. extra time allowance) or as part of a subsequent consultation
Choice of content that is difficult to render by an MT engine (will provenly generate MT-induced errors)
Choice of a non-editable original (either non-editable pdf or other graphic format or a hard copy in on-site scenarios)
Controlled environment: keyboard logging, screen recording, checking browser history
Use of a PC that is off-line
No use of a PC (using pen and paper)
Jiná…

Po sekci 2
Pokračovat na další sekci
Sekce 3 z 3
COMMENTS SECTION

Popis (nepovinný)

9. Please take a moment to share best practices that you think could be relevant/interesting to other EMT institutes / courses involved or add any other comment, e.g., on practices in BA-level translation courses.
Text dlouhé odpovědi

10. If you wish to respond in a non-anonymised way, please provide us with your (1) name and (2) e-mail. The authors of the survey may get back to you if relevant for subsequent discussions.
Text dlouhé odpovědi

Thank you very much for completing the survey!

Tomáš Svoboda
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