

Concurrent translation on collaborative platforms

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The advent of AI-supported, cloud-based collaborative translation platforms have enabled a new form of online collaborative translation – ‘concurrent translation’ (CT). CT refers to commercial translation performed on such platforms by multiple agents (translators, editors, subject-matter experts etc.) simultaneously, via concurrent access. Although the practice has recently gained more ground, research on CT is scarce. The present article reports on selected key findings of a study that investigates translators’ experiences with CT via a survey of 804 professional translators working in CT mode across different commercial platforms. Despite the affordances such as peer learning, positive competition, speed, flexibility of the volume of work and working time, and reduced responsibility and reduced stress, CT workflow comes with its substantial challenges such as time pressure, negative competition, reduced self-revision and research, all of which result in quality compromised for speed.

Keywords: Collaborative translation, concurrent translation (CT), cloud-based translation, translation workflows, translation platforms

Introduction

Translation is a time- and resource-heavy process, especially when it comes to the coordination and management of translation projects, movement and processing of files or quality assessment among other related subprocesses. However, recent technological advances such as artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing, faster mobile and wireless networks have enabled the development of tools such as cloud-based collaborative translation platforms that can streamline some of these processes and scale up the translation process. These platforms, often augmented with machine translation (MT) and other forms of AI, allow vertical and

horizontal collaboration in real time (amongst translators, editors, clients etc. and amongst multiple translators, respectively) (CSA Research 2021, 7). This allows the text to be split amongst multiple translators and the Translation, Edit, Proof-read (TEP) steps to overlap, thus reducing cost and delivery time. Translation quality in such workflow is to be maintained using integrated translation memory (TM) and terminological tools, and the concurrent involvement of revisers, project managers, clients and subject matter experts. The potential benefits brought about by the new workflow, including fast and flexible onboarding, control of data and processes amongst others, have created an increased demand for this type of service, causing the number of collaborative platforms to rise exponentially in recent years.

Although the collaborative nature of translation (both among translators, and between translators and other agents involved in the process) is not a new phenomenon (Alfer 2017; Cordingley and Frigau Manning 2016; O'Brien 2011; Trzeciak-Huss 2018), certain aspects of translation carried out in concurrent mode can be seen as problematic and pose questions with regard to the sustainability of such workflow. As Gough and Perdikaki (2018, 79) point out, “very little is known about [...] how this new mode of collaborative translation affects the product and the process of translation.”

The aim of the present study is to explore some aspects of CT by investigating how translators perceive the new workflow as well as its potential impact on the translation process and product as perceived by the participants. A special focus is placed on the concurrent nature of the translation activities, not on using collaborative platforms per se, as these are not always used in concurrent mode. For example, many platforms are used the more traditional, TEP delivery (Gough and Perdikaki 2018) or split texts into smaller chunks for non-synchronous translation and delivery by individual translators. Therefore, only a scenario where one text is simultaneously translated by a number of translators – whether by splitting a text and assigning segments to individual translators or by allowing translators to select segments on a ‘first come first served’ basis – is taken into account in this study. The key notion is that all participating translators have access to the same document and work synchronously (concurrently). In the present article, selected findings from an online survey carried out amongst 804 translators working on collaborative platforms in concurrent mode are reported.

Literature review

The term Online Collaborative Translation has been used by Zwischenberger (2021) as a meta concept to refer to all kinds of solicited and unsolicited collaborative translation efforts such as crowdsourcing, fan translation, volunteer translation or community translation. O'Brien (2011, 18) adds that collaborative translation can be performed with personal, social and commercial motivators. Therefore, CT, which is paid and is performed by professional translators, fits within the same overarching concept of collaborative translation. However, we want to distinguish CT from other terms that can be found under the umbrella term 'collaborative translation' (Zwischenberger 2021) because, whilst it overlaps with other forms of collaborative translation, it has a combined set of characteristics that are not represented by any of the other concepts (Table 1). Furthermore, CT is defined from a translation process perspective, not from a business modelling perspective (as crowdsourcing) or socio-economic perspective (as community/volunteer/fan translation). As such, CT can be defined as translation production activity carried out for commercial reasons, by multiple, predominantly trained translation professionals, using technologies that enable horizontal and vertical collaboration, but only in a synchronous way, i.e., working on one text concurrently.

Table 1.* Types of Collaborative Translation and Their Features

Features	Types of Collaborative Translation							
	Online Collaborative Translation; Community/Fan/Volunteer Translation		Unpaid Crowdsourcing		Paid Crowdsourcing		Concurrent Translation	
Commissioning Agent	Self-instigated	Externally commissioned	Self-instigated	Externally commissioned	Self-instigated	Externally commissioned	Self-instigated	Externally commissioned
Sector	Commercial	Non-commercial	Commercial	Non-commercial	Commercial	Non-commercial	Commercial	Non-commercial
Motivation	Monetary	Non-monetary	Monetary	Non-monetary	Monetary	Non-monetary	Monetary	Non-monetary
Type of Worker	Professional	Non-professional	Professional	Non-professional	Professional	Non-professional	Professional	Non-professional
Process-Collaboration Configurations	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical	Horizontal	Vertical
Process-Time Configurations	Synchronous	Asynchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous	Synchronous	Asynchronous

* The patterned cells refer to contexts where the inclusion of that particular feature is blurry (i.e., In CT 'professionals' are involved; however, depending on the workflow, 'non-professionals' might also be involved).

So far, the bulk of research on collaborative translation has focused on the conceptual, social and ethical dimensions of unpaid online collaborative translation (Morera-Mesa et al. 2013; O'Brien and Schäler 2010; O'Hagan 2009; O'Hagan 2011; Zwischenberger 2021). In contrast, literature dealing specifically

with CT is scarce despite the fact that this commercial practice has recently gained more ground (Gough and Perdikaki 2018; Moorkens 2020a). Equally, the concept of collaboration has not been so far problematised in literature. Andriessen (2003, 6) argues that “although the term ‘collaborative work’ generally refers to situations where two or more people act together to achieve a common goal, the actual extent of ‘togetherness’ can vary substantially”. Abdallah (2014, 10) also points out that efficient cooperation and good product quality is dependent on the fact that the actors involved in the production process share a common goal, such as a mutually agreed-upon level of quality. According to the 3C Collaboration Model originally proposed by Ellis, Gibbs, and Rein (1991) and updated by Fuks et al. (2008), a collaborative work environment should consist of three elements: Communication (exchange of messages and information amongst people), Coordination (management of people, their activities and resources), and Cooperation (the production taking place in a shared workspace). Such model allows for a deeper reflection on the environment supporting collaborative practices and can help us understand whether these practices are truly collaborative.

To better understand the nature of CT, we need to start with where such translation takes place, i.e., the platforms. Looking more broadly at language technologies, Nimdzi Language Technology Atlas (2022) reports a 20% growth each year, with over 800 different language technologies recorded in 2022. Out of these, an estimated 20% enable collaborative and concurrent translation but establishing the current number proves challenging due to the constant evolution and the lack of clear classification of the platforms. For example, CSA Research (2021) report on Collaborative Translation Platforms gives examples of such platforms without listing or classifying them. The groupings and the respective names of technologies listed in the various editions of the Nimdzi Language Technology Atlas (2022) also do not allow for clearly identifying which technologies facilitate horizontal and vertical collaboration (CSA 2021, 7), i.e., CT. What can be established is the approximate number of Translation Management Systems (TMS) which are believed to represent a large proportion of technologies that enable CT. The latest Nimdzi Language Technology Atlas (2022, 10) references over 160 TMS technologies and 31 Platform Language Service Providers (LSPs) (some of which can be classed as paid crowdsourcing platforms), but CT can also happen elsewhere, for example on more generic digital labour platforms such as Ureed.

The collaborative platforms differ in many ways, for example with regard to how workflows are managed or how translators are recruited. However, to our knowledge, no detailed analysis of these platforms in terms of features and capabilities is currently available, which points to a research gap in this area. Jiménez-Crespo (2017, 83–86) offers a classification of crowdsourcing platforms, some of which overlap with the platforms offering paid translation in concurrent work-

flow, but the main type of collaborative technology, the TMS, is not part of this classification.

Whilst we have an incomplete picture of the platforms themselves, we are starting to understand more about what translators think about them, how they are used, the platform workers themselves and the quality of work that is produced on them. CSA Research (2021) report that 43% of freelance linguists surveyed commonly use collaborative translation platforms. More than half of them experience benefits such as rapid TM updates, reduced turnaround times, manageable workload and facilitated communication. However, CSA Research also identifies challenges such as inconsistency in translator performances, lack of context, reviewer's action taking place before the translators have completed checking their own work, inconsistent user interfaces, maladaptation of the platform workflow to the linguists' preferred work habits, difficulty of obtaining help, as well as other challenges with regard to functionality, productivity and payment (CSA 2021). Overall, however, 58% of the participants were satisfied with the platforms they use, and data reveals "a clear correlation between the levels of satisfaction and the frequency of use" (CSA 2021, 12). With regard to the quality of translations produced on collaborative platforms, almost half of the participants (43%) believe it is not on a par with the TEP cycle. Furthermore, participants identified issues with quality in terms of responsibility and investigating quality-related complaints (CSA 2021). It is important to note that, in the CSA Research report (2021), it is not entirely clear whether all insights relate to working in concurrent mode.

In addition to the industry surveys, collaborative translation on platforms has been a topic of increased research in Translation Studies, with the biggest focus so far on working conditions and ethical issues. Contrary to CSA Research report of high levels (58%) of satisfaction (2021, 11), Firat's survey of 70 translation professionals working on platforms found that platform-mediated workflows bring about risks related to "employment status, adequate income, work-life balance, social protections, free agency, bargaining power, dependence on platform, fair allocation of risks and rewards as well as data collection, protection and privacy" (Firat 2021, 49). Moorkens (2020a, 12) suggests that translators working in the crowdsourcing paradigm translate "decontextualized strings of text anonymously via an online platform in return for a micropayment", whilst García (2015, 29), referring to collaborative translation technologies as cloud marketplaces, draws attention to the fact that "the very features that make [them] client-friendly create more demanding conditions for workers", and that "the potential of cloud computing for social good is enormous, but so is its potential for surveillance and exploitation" (García 2017, 68). Similar concerns regarding translators' agency, autonomy and privacy are voiced by Vieira et al. (2021) who regard the tracking and analysis of translators' behavioural data in the form of "real-time reporting"

(TAUS 2020) as unethical practices in which “algorithms [which] are used to triage commissions and to profile translators based on how fast they work [...] can have consequences for pay and the likelihood of receiving work in the future” (Vieira et al. 2021, 128).

Although previous studies shape our knowledge about how platform-mediated workflows affect translators’ power, agency, status, working conditions and experiences in general, they do not specifically address either the CT workflow on platforms or profile those who are engaged in it. One exception could be the work of García (2015, 27–30), who points out the variations in the profile of the translators working on platforms mentioning the openness of cloud marketplaces to “semi-professionals” and even to anyone “who can do an acceptable translation on time”.

In her three-dimensional quality model, Abdallah (2014) draws attention to the recent changes in the industry from dyadic relations between client and translator to translation production networks and argues that a holistic approach to quality requires the inclusion of the collective/social dimension to the existing process- and product-centred approaches to quality. Therefore, gaining an awareness on how and by whom translations as products are manufactured is deemed necessary for a sound evaluation of the translation, and creating guidelines for the actors involved on how to co-operate in a fair and ethical manner is emphasized for attaining sustainable quality.

The pilot study by Gough and Perdikaki (2018) is, to our knowledge, the only empirical study that has specifically focussed on the nature of work in CT. The study involves a questionnaire of 86 translators working on Smartcat and two small-scale observational studies of a translation task. The majority of the participants (74%) reported working in CT mode on Smartcat whilst the rest used the platform as a free online translation tool. Some translators were not aware of the concurrent mode capability of the platform (Gough and Perdikaki 2018, 83). According to the findings, CT can be considered to have gained ground in professional practice. However, the authors call for a cautious approach as there is not enough information related to its adoption in literature or industry publications. From the observational data, CT is found to have an impact on the translation product and process, “especially from a cognitive perspective and in relation to broadly understood interpersonal dynamics in technology mediated, distributed environment” (Gough and Perdikaki 2018, 79).

The current survey study builds on Gough and Perdikaki (2018) by extending our understanding of concurrent translation, focussing specifically on the perceived impacts of the CT workflow on the translator, translation process and the product by a larger sample of translators ($n=804$) and on the collaborative nature of CT according to the 3C Collaboration Model (Fuks et al. 2008).

Methodology

An online survey was developed using Qualtrics and distributed to translators via professional networks and social media (e.g., Facebook professional groups, LinkedIn) using a snowball sampling technique (Goodman 1961). Platform representatives were contacted via email and LinkedIn and asked to distribute the survey in their network of translators. The questionnaire contained a mixture of open- and close-ended questions, and it was piloted by several translators and reviewed by a team of experienced researchers. The project was approved by the University of Surrey Ethics Committee and the survey was open between March and June 2020, yielding 804 responses from translators working on various platforms. Data was collected anonymously, and participants were given an identity number for the purpose of data analysis. The lack of control over the number of participants working with a particular platform had an impact on the representativeness of the sample, as well as the claims and generalisations that can be made with it.

Due to the sampling method employed, there was a high level of responses (70%) from one platform (Motaword). However, almost half of the translators working with this platform (46%) reported also working with other platforms. Furthermore, as participants could indicate multiple platforms they work with, it was not always possible to attribute free-text comments made in the survey to specific platforms. Nevertheless, in order to account for any potential bias due to the number of participants working with a single platform (Motaword), we conducted a sub-sample analysis of the survey responses from participants who reported using only Motaword ($n=303$) and those who reported using platforms other than Motaword ($n=236$). Chi-square tests of independence revealed significant relationships ($p < .05$) between several variables and the platforms used by participants (Motaword vs. other platform users). In most instances, the association/effect size (Cramer's V) for the Chi-square tests was low ($< .3$), although moderate to high associations ($.3$ to $.5$) were identified, and these results are reported where relevant.

Despite these methodological limitations, the data collected provided interesting insights into the platforms and translators' experiences with them.

Data analysis

The survey data was entered into SPSS and cleaned by removing participants who had answered less than half of the questions in the survey, as well as participants whose free-text answers indicated that they had no prior experience of CT ($n=27$). This resulted in a total sample size of $n=804$. The analysis provides

descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores) of survey responses. Where appropriate, statistical tests to examine the association between variables (Pearson's chi-square), as well as the strength of any significant associations that were found (Cramer's V) were conducted. The alpha level of $p < .05$ was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant association between two variables. The Cramer's V effects sizes ranging from 0 (no association) to 1 (high association) were reported as follows: $< .5$ high; $.3$ to $.5$ moderate; $.1$ to $.3$ low and 0 to $.1$ little (if any) association.

For quantitative data from some free-text questions, such as the ones related to translators' working language pairs and roles in the industry, a semi-automatic pre-processing approach using customised Python scripts was used to convert the non-standardised free-text data into a standardised and structured dataset, which could then be analysed quantitatively. However, most of the qualitative data (i.e., other free-text responses that were not possible to pre-process) were entered into MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software, and subjected to thematic content analysis. This consists of the interpretation of the free text through systematic coding of fragments of text (meaning unit), the classification of these codes into categories, and the identification of patterns (themes). A total of 75% of the whole sample (605/804) provided free-text responses, showing a high level of engagement with the survey questions. Using MAXQDA, the free-text responses were coded with commentaries around the identified main and subsidiary concepts. Further, these codes were grouped under three broad themes which were gleaned from the data: 'affordances' introduced by CT workflow, 'issues' participants come across when they work in CT mode, and 'consequences' of these issues.

Sample profile

The translators in our sample are generally young. 60% reported being 40 years old or younger, with 25% under 30. The gender distribution in our sample seems different to the general perception of a female-dominated translation profession as only 55% of the participants recorded their gender as female, compared to 66% (CSA 2020), 68% (CIOL 2011) and 76% (Inbox Translation 2020) in other general surveys of translators. The majority of participants had 10 or fewer years' experience as a translator (less than five years 26%, six to 10 years 29%). Interestingly, 67% of participants in our sample had formal training in translation (a higher percentage compared to other surveys, e.g., 53% in CSA Research 2020, 44% in CIOL 2011 and 29% in Inbox Translation 2020), with more female participants having undertaken formal training in translation (74%) compared to male participants (59%).

A total of 84 languages, 233 language pairs and 365 language directions were represented in the sample (see Figure 1 for the top 20 language pairs). The unusual third place for English-Turkish might have been caused by the relatively high number of respondents working with Motaword platform, which has many translators working with this language pair.

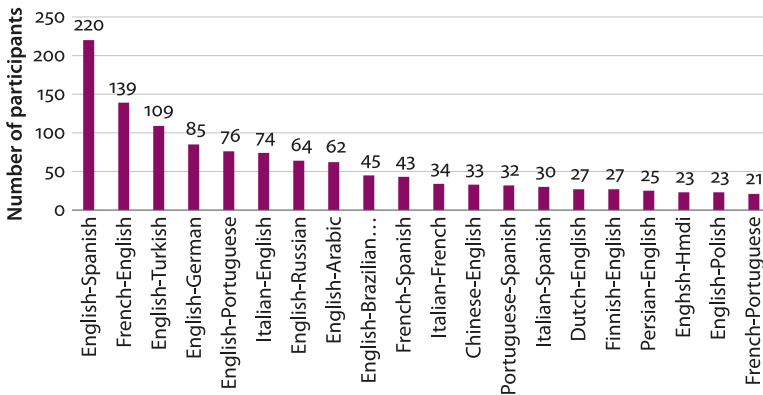


Figure 1. Top 20 Language Pairs Represented in the Sample

To summarise, our sample seems to diverge from samples of other, general surveys of translators and involves more participants with formal training in translation (67%) and more male translators (55%).

Findings

In this section, selected key findings from the survey will be presented. Analysis of platforms used by the participants will be followed by the time spent on CT, the nature of the tasks as well as the profile and experiences of translators working in CT mode.

Platforms used in CT

Translators surveyed in this study represented 49 translation platforms (see Appendix 1). Table 2 shows the distribution of the platforms in terms of how well they were represented by these translators. For example, there were 23 platforms represented by 1 translator, which constituted 45% of the platform sample. On the other hand, five platforms, each represented by over 100 participants, constituted

10% of the overall platform sample. Platforms with more than 10 participants are listed in Figure 2.

Table 2. Representation of the Platforms within the Sample

	Number of platforms in the sample	Each platform represented by:	Percentage of platforms within sample (<i>n</i> = 49)
	21	1 participant	43%
	15	> 1 to ≤10 participants	31%
	8	> 10 to ≤100 participants	16%
	5	> 100 participants	10%
Total number of platforms in the sample	49		100%

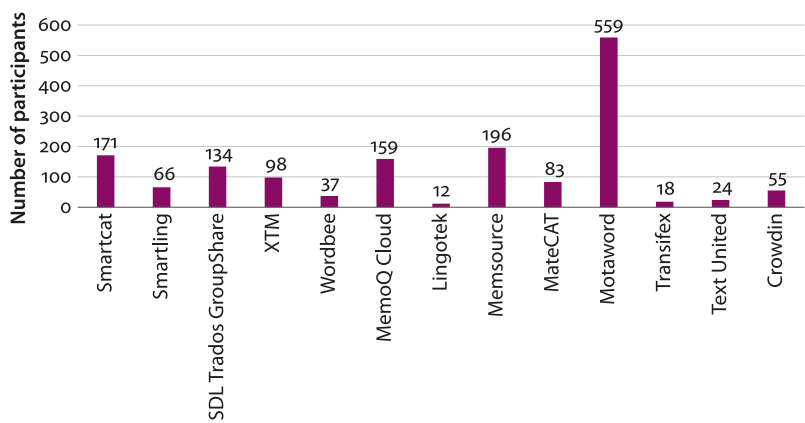


Figure 2. Platforms with > 10 participants

Participants reported working on a wide range of platforms, the classification of which poses challenges due to their multifarious nature and their continuous evolution. With the focus of our study in mind, we retrospectively decided to focus on two types of approaches to task allocation in CT: (1) ‘*split and assign*’ approach where a project manager splits a text and assigns it to a limited number of translators; and (2) ‘*first come first served*’ approach – a more automated approach – where a text is made available to an unlimited number of translators

who pick segments on the ‘first come first served’ basis (Table 3). To the best of our knowledge about the platforms, 38% of the sample involves the translators working with ‘first come first served’ approach only, while 30% is composed of the translators working with ‘split and assign’ platforms only. The remaining 32% is composed of those using both types (Table 3). We analysed both quantitative and qualitative data taking this variation in the sample into account to get a clearer and more balanced picture of the data. When presenting the findings, we report them accordingly if there is a striking difference between these groups of platforms; otherwise, we report on the whole sample. It needs to be acknowledged that the 99% of the data belonging to ‘first come first served’ approach in the present sample comes from the translators who use Motaword. Therefore, whenever a relationship between these two approaches (‘first come first served’ and ‘split and assign’) is mentioned, the relevant result related to the ‘first come first served’ approach essentially comes from Motaword users.

Overall, whilst the number and variety of platforms facilitating CT is growing, there is also evidence that translators are getting frustrated with having to work on too many platforms (CSA 2020, 2021). The CSA Research (2020, 39) claim that, on average, translators work on as many as five platforms. The present study shows a slightly different picture, with 52% of translators reportedly working on one platform (most of those on Motaword and Smartcat), 33% on two or three, whilst 12% use four to five platforms. Only 3% of the sample worked on more than five platforms, with 10 platforms being the highest number reported. On average, the 804 sampled translators worked on two platforms (mean value), which is lower than in the CSA Research survey (2020). This difference could be due to the present survey addressing translators who specifically work in CT mode, whereas this was not explicit in the CSA Research (2020) survey.

The variety of platforms supporting CT seems to extend to other areas, e.g., marketplaces. Smartcat is a platform with its own marketplace for translators, but more generic platforms (e.g., Ureed) seem to have tools to support translators who seek work via their marketplace. Also, there seems to be a trend to extend/augment other types of platforms where multilingual exchanges happen, with a component that enables quick, flexible and possibly low-cost translations without having to resort to using more traditional language services, e.g., QT Linguist. Traditional TMSs, although increasingly automated, are also being challenged by ‘first come first served’ models.

Communication on platforms

An important aspect of collaborative platforms, especially in CT, is supposed to be efficient communication. Flagged by Gough and Perdikaki (2018, 86) as an

Table 3. Distribution of the participants ($n = 804$) across the platforms in the sample

Approach	Types of the platforms in the sample based on the approach to task distribution	Examples of platforms	Distribution of the participants across the platforms in the sample %
'First come first served' (Automated approach)	'First come first served' platforms for translation	Unbabel, Motaword, Flitto	38%
	Language Service Provider (LSP) with their own translation technology platform / TMS	SDL Trados Groupshare, Gengo	
	Translation Management Systems	CrowdIn, Memsource, MemoQCloud, Lingotek, Smartcat	
'Split and assign' (Managed by a project manager)	Cloud-based CAT Tools with collaborative functions	Matecat, Wordfast, Dejavu	30%
	Language/multilingual content-related businesses who own/developed translation technology for their own needs beyond translation	Agito/Language Wire, Appen, Rev.com, Sfera	
	Non-language related businesses who own/developed translation technology for their own needs	SAP, Pixelogic, QT	
Both and 'First come first served' and 'Split and assign'		All of the above	32%
Total			100%

important element of CT workflow “due to the instantaneous nature of the inter-personal dynamics”, communication is also a core component of the 3C Collaboration model by Fuks et al. (2008). Therefore, the survey included questions around communication tools. As Figure 3 shows, two platforms, Motaword (70%) and Smartcat (72%), stand out from the dataset as platforms where translators reported being able to communicate directly via a chat function. A total of 53%

translators said the platforms they work with have a live chat feature, whilst 47% report that they did not. The fact that some platforms do not have this feature and yet translators indicated otherwise, suggests that translators are not always aware of the functionality of the tools they use.

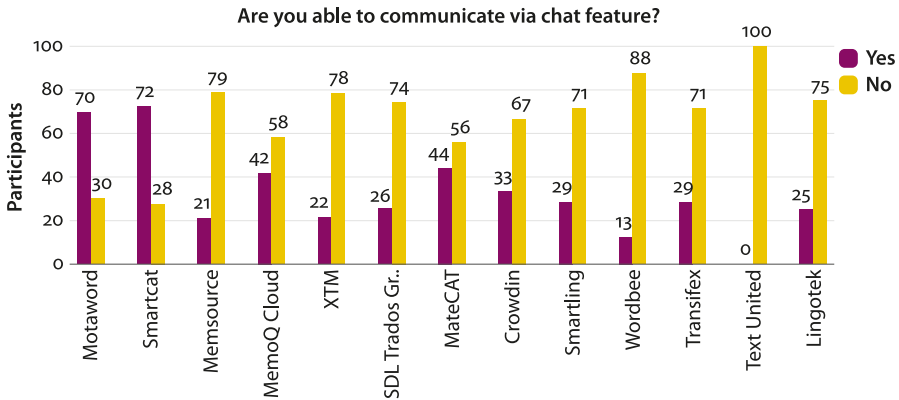


Figure 3. Communication Feature on Platforms

Participants also reported using asynchronous communication via segment-level query or a comment feature regardless of whether a live chat feature was available. It was surprising to find out that, even in the presence of built-in live communication tools, translators in our sample used external communication tools such as e-mail, chat tools from e-mail platforms, WhatsApp, Skype, Slack, Discord, Yammer, Telegram, Zoom etc. Some reported using live chat with the support team, and a comment section with other translators, whilst others said they were unsure if such tools exist or whether they are deactivated for particular projects. Others said that in-tool chat features are used very irregularly; especially if alternative means of communication had been established beforehand.

When asked with whom they communicate with via a live chat, participants in this study responded as follows: 40% with Project Managers (PMs), 31% with other translators, 20% with editors, 9% with others (support – general, technical, localization, desktop publishing; platform staff; client).

The fact that just over half (53%) of translators can communicate directly during a workflow whereby achieving good quality is perceived to be “more of a challenge” (CSA 2021, 19) seems to suggest that improvements in the functionality of ‘Communication,’ the core component of the 3C Collaboration model (Fuks et al. 2008), is needed. Furthermore, translators’ use of external chat tools, even if there is one provided within a platform, might raise interesting questions around translators’ potential lack of knowledge about the functionalities of the platform

or unwillingness to use the built-in features for different reasons (e.g., their user friendliness or wanting to escape potential surveillance).

Time spent on CT

Understanding how much time translators spend on CT in relation to the traditional TEP workflow was an important objective of the study. Therefore, three related questions were asked to establish how much time participants usually spend on translation (in relation to other roles), the time dedicated to translation in CT mode (as opposed to TEP workflow), and, within CT, the time they spend on post-editing MT.

Data suggests that translation is the main work focus for over half of the sample (54%) who dedicate at least 61% of their working time to translation (Table 4). At the time of the present study, CT does not seem to be a mainstream workflow. A total of 70% of sampled translators spend 20% or less of their working time in CT mode, followed by 23% who work in CT for 21–60% of their time. Only 7% of respondents reported working with CT for the majority of their working time, i.e., 61–100% (Table 4). It is also interesting to see that, according to the participants in our sample, MT has not yet been widely used in CT. 40% of the participants indicated that post-editing is not part of their workflow in CT and 47% report MT to be present in at most 40% of their work (Figure 4).

Table 4. Total working time dedicated to “translating” apart from other professional roles and total working time in CT

Total working time dedicated to translating	Participants	Total working time dedicated to translating in CT	Participants
≤20%	16%	≤20%	70%
21–40%	14%	21–40%	16%
41–60%	15%	41–60%	7%
61–80%	21%	61–80%	3%
81–100%	33%	81–100%	4%

Nature of tasks in CT

Given the assumed rationale behind CT as a solution to translating long texts with short deadlines, we were interested to know the average length of translation tasks participants are working with in concurrent mode. A total of 62% of the participants worked with assignments shorter than 1,000 words, and only 18% said their

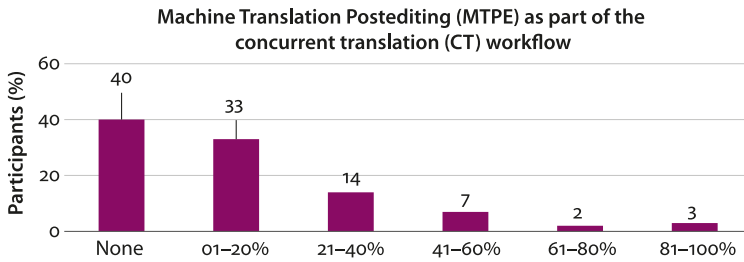


Figure 4. MTPE as part of the CT workflow

assignments are longer than 3,000 words (Figure 5). Although the average number of words in individual assignments in CT does not necessarily indicate the overall length of texts translated in CT mode, it is clear that the portions of the text translators work with are small. Furthermore, users of the ‘first come first served’ approach seem more likely to work on smaller assignments compared to the users of the ‘split and assign’ approach (see Figure 6). Accordingly, 73% of translators working with ‘first come first served’ workflow said that on average they worked on texts no larger than 1,000 words, compared to 39% for ‘split and assign’. Further, 61% of the ‘split and assign’ users said on average they worked on texts 1,000 words or longer, whilst this figure is 28% for ‘first come first served’ users. The sub-sample analysis mentioned in the Methodology revealed that participants who work only with Motaword tend to receive significantly shorter assignments than the translators working with other platforms, $\chi^2(3) = 127.572$, $p < .001$, which represents a high association with platform (.50) [Cramér’s V is .500] for the Chi-square test.

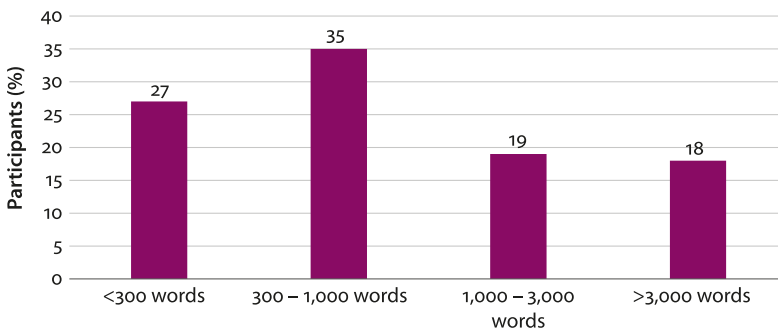


Figure 5. Length of individual translation assignments in concurrent mode

We also asked about the nature of texts translated in concurrent mode to see whether this workflow is more suited, and therefore used, for any specific content type. Most of the participants (88%) provided an answer to this question.

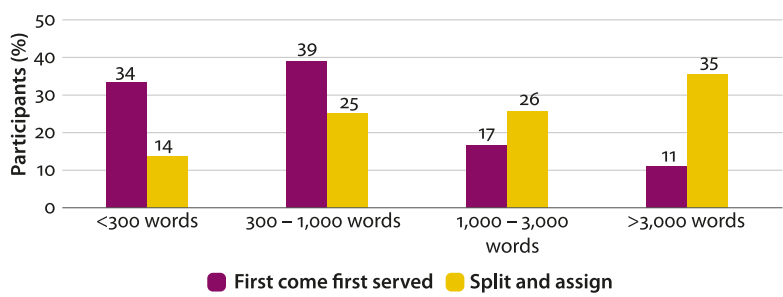


Figure 6. Length of individual translation assignments in ‘first come first served’ vs ‘split and assign’ workflows

The free-text nature of this question required a qualitative analysis and standardisation of fuzzy categories, resulting in 60 categories representing the subject matters being translated in CT. Marketing and Legal texts were the two top categories reported, respectively, by 37% and 28% of the participants. These were the only categories that broke the ≥ 200 participant mark, and were followed, within the range of ≥ 100 participants, by Technical, Instructional, Medical, General and Finance texts. Finally, a few other categories were reported by more than 50 participants: Website, Administration, User Interface, Games, Information Technology and Surveys.

It is surprising that the most popular type of texts belongs to the marketing domain. Marketing texts, being user facing, usually require not only publishable quality but also a degree of creativity and consistency of style. It could be argued this goes against what can be expected in a CT workflow where time pressure and conglomeration of styles can put the final quality at risk.

Translators’ experiences with concurrent translation (CT)

Translators’ experiences of working in concurrent mode were one of the key foci of the present research. To understand these experiences better, we collected quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data is derived from close-ended questions covering participants’ perceptions of the impact CT has on collaboration, teamwork, communication, surveillance, competition, quality, etc. (Appendix 2). Qualitative data comes from open-ended questions about translators’ experiences and attitudes towards CT as well as from free-text comments which were added to most close-ended questions. The analysis below combines the data into a thematic framework, comprising three broad themes: ‘affordances’ introduced by concurrent workflow, ‘issues’ participants come across when they work in CT mode and ‘consequences’ brought about by these issues. Both ‘issues’

and ‘consequences’ are composed of negative opinions related to the concurrent workflow, whereas affordances are based on positive sentiment. It is important to note that only 8% of the respondents providing free-text responses expressed only positive opinions, while 76% mentioned only negative ones. The remaining 16% expressed both positive and negative views. This would suggest that, overall, despite some visible benefits of working in concurrent mode, translators largely experience its drawbacks.

One of the most important findings of this study relates to translators’ attitudes towards CT. Almost half of the participants (48%,) said they do not prefer this workflow to traditional one-translator job, with 35% remaining neutral. Only 17% stated that they prefer working in CT mode. One participant who “prefer[s] not to work in concurrent mode” found it “unfriendly and competitive, [and] producing additional stress”, while another felt they “don’t have the same feeling of ownership of a translation or pride”, feeling “like a cog in a wheel” as depicted by Moorkens (2020a). They felt less motivation when working in CT “because the work feels more mechanical” and that “the feeling of duty is there, but not the drive to creativity”.

Affordances introduced by concurrent translation

Whilst some aspects of job satisfaction by freelance translators more broadly have been reported by Dam and Zethsen (2016), a closer look at the broad theme of ‘affordances’ of the CT workflow highlights several sub-themes which reflect some of the positive aspects specific to CT: peer learning, positive competition, speed and flexibility of the volume of work and working time, and reduced responsibility and reduced stress.

Data revealed that CT workflow can stimulate teamwork among translators, providing opportunities for learning in an encouraging environment where they can benefit from other translators’ comments and help. A total of 62% of the sampled translators agreed that working in concurrent mode contributes to their peer learning process. As one participant says, “I feel the support and feel a little more comfortable because other experts will contribute.” CT was also reported to encourage positive competition. Previous studies (Gough 2019) suggested that the feeling of competition may have a positive impact on translators who reported producing higher-quality translations. This dataset reveals that 44% of the participants acknowledge such a positive impact, while almost a third (29%) do not. The qualitative data analysis suggests that some participants, despite finding CT challenging and stressful, do enjoy a friendly and positive competition the workflow affords, finding it motivating to work faster and produce higher-quality output. In addition, they find it fun to work with others as a team and more interesting

to solve problems through communication. Interestingly, some participants suggested that the “surveillance” effect of CT workflow motivates them to produce higher-quality translations because they “don’t want other people to see [their] potentially embarrassing errors”. One participant reported that CT “is very stressful because someone is watching [their] work but also can be helpful to get good quality result”. Such positive competition can be seen as a constructive contribution to the Cooperation element in the 3C Collaboration model by Fuks et al. (2008).

The positively competitive environment of CT can also motivate some translators not only to focus on quality, but also to work faster. “It’s the way forward: it helps with speed, quality, communication, and quality assurance”, one participant says. The concept of speed in the present study refers to translators’ perceived working speed in CT workflow. Although referring to a slightly different notion of speed, i.e., turnaround time, speed is also identified among the benefits provided by collaborative platforms in the CSA Research (2021, 17) in that “almost two-thirds of the participants agreed that turnaround times can be significantly reduced.”

Another affordance of CT identified in the data relates to the workload and schedule management. Translators reported having more flexibility to decide when and what portion of the translation assignment they will accept, especially in the ‘first come first served’ workflow. This contributes positively to the Coordination component of the 3C Collaboration model. The opportunity to be selective when choosing segments to translate seems to be a factor affecting translators’ preference for CT workflow. One participant prefers CT “because there’s no obligation to complete the entire assignment. I can do as much or as little I like, without pressure”. This is in contrast to committing to the entire translation, when they need to “look through the entire document to be sure [they] feel comfortable with the topic, content, writing style, etc. as well as the deadline”.

Reduced level of responsibility and the corresponding lower level of stress are emphasized as other reasons for favouring CT workflow by the participants. In one translator’s words, “It can be less stressful because it is non-binding – you can decide at any point that you don’t want to continue and just leave the platform.” However, data suggests that this reduced level of responsibility lowers the level of ownership of the translation, with implications for the translation quality and the translators’ job satisfaction. These factors will be discussed further in the ‘Issues’ and ‘Consequences’ Sections.

Issues with concurrent translation

As mentioned above, issues with CT and their consequences were voiced by a considerably larger proportion of translators in our sample. Previous studies reported on some of the adverse effects of working as a freelance translator (Courtney and Phelan 2019; Ruokonen and Mäkisalo 2018), and more specifically, working as a freelance translator on digital platforms (Moorkens 2020a; Firat 2021). Firat (2021, 49) for example found that translators were exposed to “risks related to employment status, income level, work-life balance, social protections, free agency, bargaining power, dependence on the platform, allocation of risks and rewards, and data collection, protection and privacy”. Our findings, with a specific focus on CT, identified the most important issues as time pressure, negative competition, translation process-related issues such as shift of focus from self-revision to drafting (superficial translation, confirming segments sooner, confirming unfinished work as finished, less research and less self-revision), lack of control over the workflow and on the final quality, translating out of context, lack of trust among collaborators, lack of training/briefing, variation in translation styles, insufficient remuneration, disparity across translators’ competences and technical issues. Below, the first three issues, which were most prevalent, will be discussed.

Time pressure is the most prominent problem reported by the respondents, and it seems to be perceived as the root cause of many other issues related to CT workflow. The survey did not include a question that particularly addressed time pressure – this emerged from the coding of free-text comments provided by 75% of the whole sample, 56% of whom feel the pressure to work faster. CT can make translators feel as if they are in a race, which adds more pressure leading to extra mental stress and discomfort. Phrases describing CT as being in a “horse race”, “shark tank” or in the “Hunger Games”, or that one must “grab the cake and don’t look back” represent a poignant sentiment demonstrating that translating in CT can be overly competitive, contradicting the Cooperation component of 3C Model. 63% of all participants felt that CT increases the sense of competition between the translators working on the same project and only 18% disagreed, while 19% remained neutral. Translators reported feeling restricted by not being able to work at their own pace and take a break when they need to. Reportedly, “translators try to finish translation as soon as possible in order to get more work because of the fierce competition” and they feel they need to ‘beat’ the other translators to the segments” in order to get paid. When it comes to time pressure, the difference between the translators working with ‘first come first served’ platforms and the those working with ‘split and assign’ platforms is notable. Those who only used ‘first come first served’ platforms were more likely to think that CT increases

the sense of competition (75%) compared to translators working with ‘split and assign’ platforms (45%). Compared to the users of other platforms, participants working only with Motaword were significantly more likely to agree that working in CT mode increases the sense of competition between translators, $\chi^2(4) = 57.173$, $p < .001$, which represents a moderate association with platform (.33) [Cramér’s V is .331] for the Chi-square test.

Furthermore, and rather in contradiction to the ‘collaborative’ idea of CT, only 27% of all participants believe that the presence of other collaborators on the platform makes them feel less isolated as translators.

Apart from extreme time pressure and competition, CT seems to impact the way translators work from the translation process perspective, as previously highlighted by Gough (2018, 2019) and CSA Research (2020, 15). The current study confirms this is a complex issue that cannot be ignored. More than half of all the participants (60%) think that their translation process is different when they work concurrently and half of them provided further insights into the ways this process is affected. Firstly, the self-revision phase is often skipped and replaced by a superficial revision during the drafting phase, potentially resulting in more work for the editor. The main reason for this is the pressure on translators to produce “TM-ready segments” (Gough 2018), i.e., confirming their segments as soon as possible so that they can be reused, via a TM, by other translators. This leads to translators’ drafts being submitted without the chance to do a final edit, and as reported, to a perception that ‘unfinished work is regarded as finished’. A related finding is reported by CSA Research (2021: 18) where “21% of the participants noted that reviewers begin their task before the translator has completed checking their own work, indicating an overlap of the translate and edit steps.” In the CSA Research (2021, 18) report, the reason for this “premature review step” is hypothesized as occurring “due to platforms prematurely moving segments to the next stage but is more likely tied to a misconfiguration of a workflow or to linguists being insufficiently trained”. The present study suggests that the “premature review step” can also be caused by the time pressure and the ‘first come first served’ approach on some platforms which causes the translators to confirm incomplete segments. The sub-sample analysis reveals that the percentage of those who reported that the editing takes place immediately after the segments are confirmed is twice as many (22%) in participants who reported using only Motaword compared to the users of other platforms (11%). Considering the fact that Motaword belongs to the ‘first-come-first served’ paradigm, this seems to suggest that, compared to ‘split and assign’ paradigm, the immediacy of the editor’s revision after the translator confirms the translated segment is stronger in the ‘first come first served paradigm’, which might potentially increase the pressure on the translators making it difficult to revise/edit their translations. Some translators report skipping self-revision

and spending more time on drafting because they worry other translators or editor might see their draft translations unfolding. “I spend more time the first time round in case I am being checked already. When I work alone, I spend less time on the first round and more time going over it all at the end because they only see the final version”, one translator explains. Data also suggests that some participants do not know whether they can go back and revise the confirmed segments. Some say they can request changes to their translations but prefer not to because such request would be regarded as “correction of a wrong translation”, which might set them back in getting new translation jobs. Interestingly, 56% of respondents said they are not able to revise segments once they have been confirmed by the editor but at the same time, almost 40% said they are able to revise other translator’s segments. Table 5 shows the data across platforms indicating the percentage of the participants who believed they can “go back and revise their own segments after they are confirmed by the editor” and whether they can “revise segments assigned to other translators”. The lack of uniformity in the responses related to a particular platform implies that either these features change from project to project or participants are not sure whether revision of either their own segments or segments of others’ is possible. This might have been caused by the participants’ lack of awareness of the particular features of the platform they work with.

Table 5. Possibility of revision of own/others’ segments after confirmation by the editor

In CT mode, can you revise your own segments after they are confirmed by the editor?			On the platforms you have worked on, can you revise segments assigned to other translators?		
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Motaword	44%	56%	Motaword	48%	52%
Smartcat	43%	57%	Smartcat	29%	71%
Memsources	34%	66%	Memsources	32%	68%
MemoQ Cloud	43%	57%	MemoQ Cloud	24%	76%
SDL Trados GroupShare	51%	49%	SDL Trados GroupShare	34%	66%
XTM	50%	50%	XTM	37%	63%
MateCAT	39%	61%	MateCAT	24%	76%
Smartling	28%	72%	Smartling	30%	70%
Crowdin	78%	22%	Crowdin	58%	42%
Wordbee	33%	67%	Wordbee	44%	56%
Transifex	57%	43%	Text United	57%	43%
Text United	29%	71%	Transifex	67%	33%
Lingotek	67%	33%	Lingotek	33%	67%

Furthermore, translators reported spending less time and effort on doing research while translating, “cherry-picking of easy segments” or “pushing anything but the most basic translation through a process”.

To summarise, superficial translation drafting combined with less revision and less research as well as cherry-picking of easy segments in some workflows are symptoms of an altered translation process which promotes poor quality translations as perceived by the translators. Such issues associated with the workflow management can be seen as ineffectiveness of the Coordination component within the 3C Collaboration model.

Consequences of the issues associated with concurrent translation

Data analysis revealed that the issues inherent in CT have the following unfavourable consequences: compromised quality and consistency, lack of satisfaction and ownership of the translation task as a whole and devaluation of translation. Due to space constraints, we shall only discuss the most important aspect, that of quality.

Quality is the first and foremost aspect that is affected adversely by almost all of the issues identified. More than half of the participants providing free-text comments (59%) think that quality is negatively affected by the CT workflow. The most prominent factor affecting quality of translations in CT is enforced speed, as reported by 41% of the translators providing free-text comments, who say they are forced to translate under extreme time pressure leading to less revision, less research and less thought devoted to the translation. Other studies support this finding suggesting that workflows in cloud-based platforms appear to be “structured more toward delivery times than quality and specialisation” (García 2015, 27). Referring to quality, Abdallah (2014, 12) suggests that “the production networks in their current state manifest themselves as a challenging working environment for the translator, as pressures from the rest of the production network may impose certain unethical behaviour on the translator, despite their desire to act according to their deontological ethics”.

Among other factors leading to poor quality are failure to consider the context due to time pressure and non-linear segment-level translation and lack of consistency due to the concurrent access of multiple translators with varying levels of competency and translation styles. Lack of consistency as a factor affecting quality was mentioned by more than one-third of the participants. Although lack of consistency could be potentially dealt with by the proofreader/editor at the end of the translation task, this can be counter-productive if there is too much disparity between the chunks of text. In addition to fears of falling quality in more traditional production workflows (Moorkens 2020b), the issues of poor-quality trans-

lations produced on digital platforms identified in this study add to the ongoing, more general debate about fit for purpose translation and the quality of multilingual datasets that make their way into other uses and applications (Kreutzer et al. 2022).

Limitations

Due to methodological limitations (see Methodology), caution should be exercised in extrapolating the results to all translators working in CT. Further, as it became apparent that the translators' experiences differ depending on whether they work with the 'first come first served' or the 'split and assign' approach, our understanding of those differences is, at this moment, limited as it was not always possible to know which platform free-text responses referred to. Also, some platforms, e.g., Smartling, have different workflow options available, and we cannot know which one(s) translators referred to in the survey.

Conclusion and discussion

The present study revealed that presently CT has not entered the mainstream. However, it needs to be monitored as the number and variety of technologies supporting it are growing. According to our sample, CT is not preferred or particularly liked by translators, and despite some positive effects on translators' working practices, it is a workflow that engenders much criticism. Excessive time pressure and quality being compromised by the enforced speed stand out as the main reasons for this criticism.

Data enabled identification of two workflows in CT mode, i.e., 'split and assign' and 'first come first served'. Further empirical research is needed to understand the differences between these and other potential workflows in terms of their sustainability, impact on the translation process and the quality of the translations produced using these workflows.

CT does not seem to be fully supported by an authentic collaborative work environment due to the shortcomings related to the three elements of the 3C Collaboration Model (Fuks et al. 2008): Communication (exchange of messages and information amongst people), Coordination (management of people, their activities and resources), and Cooperation (the production taking place in a shared workspace).

'Communication' is acknowledged as an important component of collaboration; however, data suggests that overall, CT platforms are not well supported

technologically in terms of built-in communication tools. Further, even if such communication features are available, translators' lack of knowledge of them prevents effective utilization of these features, and this has negative implications on the authenticity of collaboration in CT workflows. Findings suggest that solutions are needed for better design and management of communication.

'Coordination' is another key component of collaboration. However, the present study reveals flaws in the management of people, workflows, privacy as well as resources (i.e., TM, MT and terminology resources). Also, lack of training, knowledge of the features available to translators or best practice guidance for translators, project managers and translation buyers seem to result in CT workflow not being used in the best way it could.

'Cooperation' seems to be enabled in CT workflow to some extent as more than half of the participants (62%) mentioned peer learning as an asset in CT. Certain workflow configurations (e.g., 'first come first served') seem to be less conducive to cooperation and collaborative spirit as they promote negative competition leading to quality issues, stress and overall dislike of the workflow. Despite the emphasis on 'collaboration' in the commercial narrative of the platforms, translators working in CT mode do not seem to feel less isolated compared to when they work outside of platforms and overall, they do not feel that they work towards a common goal due to negative competition.

Results of this study call for a better and more transparent collaborative environment to ensure acceptable translation quality while maintaining favourable working conditions for translators.

Overall, research-informed solutions are needed to improve processes in CT workflows leading to a more effective text production, better resulting quality of translations and more satisfied workforce.

Funding

This project was funded by Expanding Excellence in England (E3) grant provided by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

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Appendix 1. List of Platforms Represented in the Sample

List of Platforms Represented in the Sample (as reported)

1. Agito/Language Wire	16. Mars Editor	33. Sfera
2. Amara	17. Matecat	34. Smartcat
3. Appen	18. MemoQ Cloud	35. Smartling
4. Coach	19. Memsources	36. STAR CLM
5. Conyac	20. Motaword	37. Straker Translations
6. CrowdIn	21. MotionPoint	38. Text United
7. Déjà vu	22. Nubuto	39. Tolq
	23. OmegaT	40. Transifex
8. Flitto	24. One Hour Translation	41. Translation Workspace
9. Gengo	25. Onesky	42. Unbabel
	26. Online SAP Translation Tool	43. Ureed
10. HSTE	27. Pixelogic Media (pHelix platform)	44. Wordbee
11. I-Correct	28. Poeditor	45. Wordfast Server
12. Kató	29. Qordoba	46. WordsOnline Jonckers
13. Lilt	30. QT Linguist	47. XTM Cloud
14. Lingotek	31. Rev.com	48. XTRF
15. Lokalise	32. SDL Trados Groupshare	49. Zanata

Appendix 2. Translators' Experiences in Concurrent Translation

Statements provided in the questionnaire regarding translators' experiences with concurrent translation on platforms.	Responses	Whole Sample (%)	'First come first served' platforms (%)	'Split and assign' platforms (%)
I prefer working in concurrent mode as opposed to traditional one-translator job.	Agree	17	19	16
	Neutral	35	30	29

Statements provided in the questionnaire regarding translators' experiences with concurrent translation on platforms.		Whole Sample (%)	'First come first served' platforms (%)	'Split and assign' platforms (%)
Working in concurrent mode, translators can learn from one another.	Disagree	48	51	49
	Agree	62	60	64
	Neutral	23	23	21
Working in concurrent mode with other translators makes me feel less isolated.	Disagree	15	17	14
	Agree	27	26	30
	Neutral	32	27	34
Working in concurrent mode makes me feel uncomfortable because other people, including the project manager, other colleagues or a client, can see my work unfolding.	Disagree	41	47	36
	Agree	25	20	35
	Neutral	24	22	20
Working in concurrent mode makes me feel uneasy because my performance is being monitored.	Disagree	52	58	45
	Agree	24	20	32
	Neutral	25	23	24
The presence of other colleagues (translators, editors etc.) on collaborative platforms motivates me to produce higher quality work.	Disagree	51	57	45
	Agree	44	43	44
	Neutral	27	28	26
Working in concurrent mode increases the sense of competition between translators working on the same project.	Disagree	29	29	30
	Agree	63	75	45
	Neutral	19	14	25
The presence of the editor on collaborative platforms has a comforting effect on my performance.	Disagree	18	12	31
	Agree	31	30	29
	Neutral	43	43	42
The on-the-spot nature of editor's actions on collaborative platforms has a negative effect on the collaborative process.	Disagree	26	27	29
	Agree	24	20	26
	Neutral	47	51	45
	Disagree	30	29	29

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Publication history

Date received: 30 June 2022

Date accepted: 7 November 2022

Published online: 10 January 2023