

A Changing Market: Money, Status, and Technology

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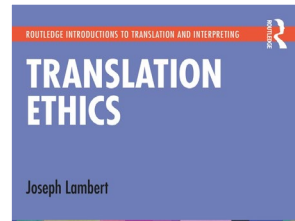
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Introductions



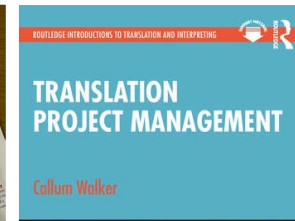
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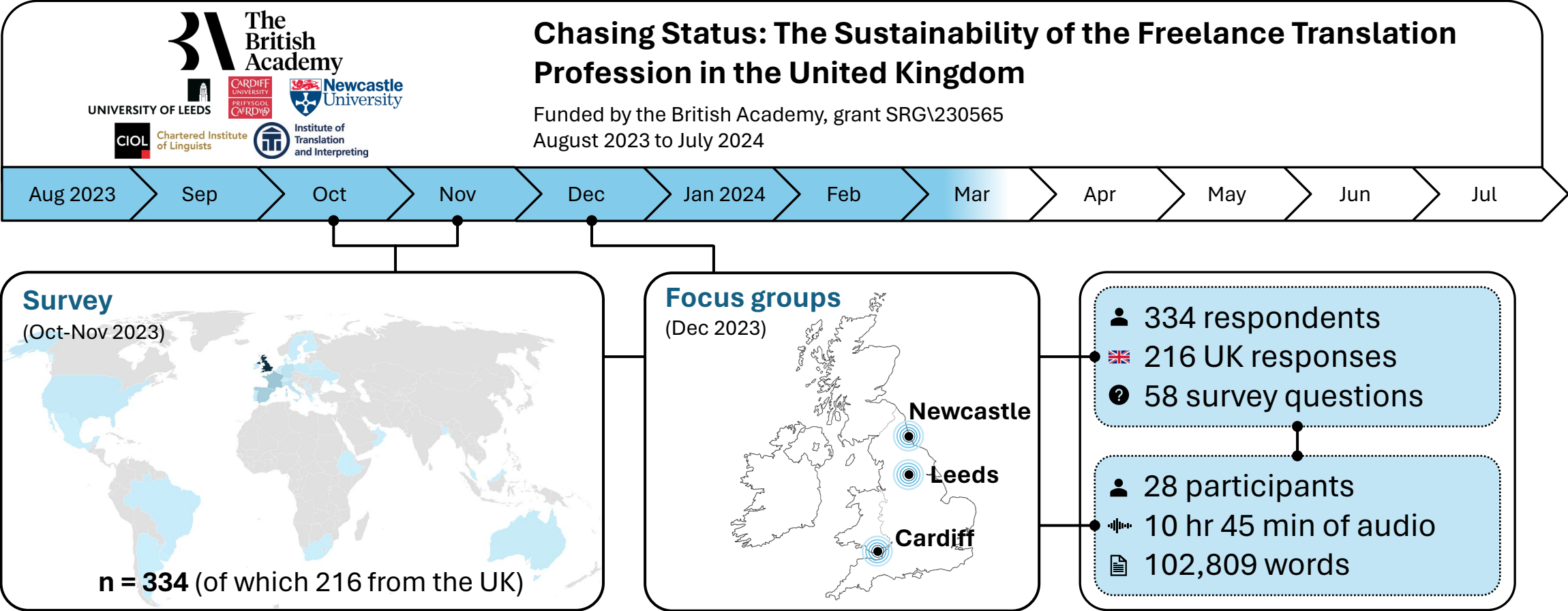


Overview

- Our research
- Key concerns and context
- Contrasting perspectives, balance, and tipping points
- Potential paths to change



Our research



Translators love what they do...

Whatever I am doing, I am only doing it because I want to and because I love to do it.

I really love the fact that I can, like, do a really deep delve into one really tiny niche area and spend like a whole week learning loads about it.

I enjoy the independence. The fact that I'm responsible for myself, for freedom of location, and that if I work well, I get the benefit.

I really enjoy translation. When I'm translating, I feel happy.

I think there's always the opportunity to learn something new and that's what I love about it.

I absolutely love what I do.

I love translating. I can't see myself doing anything else really

What I really enjoy is the **challenge** each time you get a new text. Working in marketing translation, there's a **huge demand on your creative skills**. You can sit there, you can play with different options, you have to twist things around in your head, and **it's that buzz you get from your brain cells pinging around that I really love**.

We all love languages and the cultures that are associated with that, and imparting your knowledge and making improvements in the world, changing things and making sure that ideas in one language then transfer into another.

I love to help people understand each other and open "new worlds" for them.

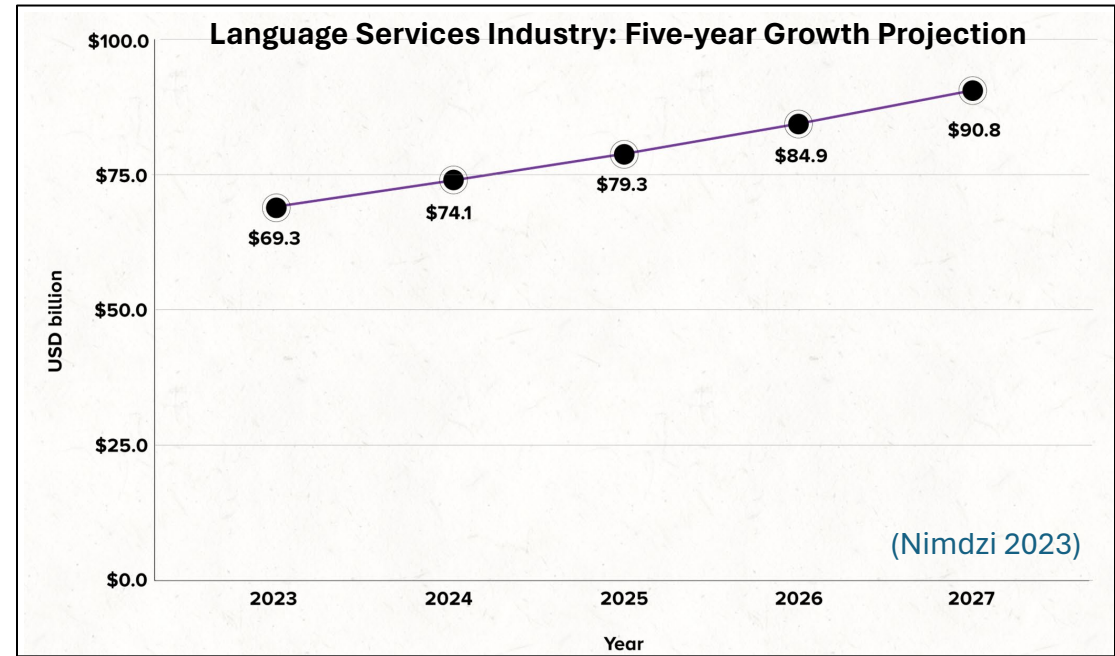
I love learning. I love learning new vocabulary and, you know, idioms in my languages. I love learning new knowledge about my fields of expertise.

Key concerns and context

Job (dis)satisfaction

38% dissatisfied with current professional situation

(SFT 2022)



Disruptive tech

- Technological change
- 35% key stress factor (ELIS 2020)
- (Neural) machine translation
- Post-editing, related workflows, and agency over workflows
- Future exposure to AI?
- Platform economy / Uberisation

Value and status

- Recognition/visibility
- Regulation (or lack thereof)
- Non-professional translation
- Perceptions
 - > of what it involves
 - > of what it's worth
 - > by clients and LSPs

Pay and conditions

- Low pay
- Key stress factor (75%); extra income needed (41%) (ELIS 2020)
- Disparity with industry health (ATC and Nimdzi 2021)
- Pressure to adapt
- “Feast and famine”
- Work/life balance and wellbeing

Examples from our research

Disruptive tech

225 mentions of “AI” and 1452 mentions of “MT” in survey open-text responses

“Both the general public and business communities will believe the AI hype and not consider **the very real knowledge, experience, talent that is needed in order to translate**”

“With MTPE, [...] **satisfaction in doing the job is also at risk** (loss of creativity and time to do a good job).”

Value and status

72% feel that the public do not consider translators to be important

“If good translators quit, there will **always be other people willing to work for low costs** (bilinguals who want a side hustle, students)”

“Professionals [...] are **constantly undercut by non-professionals** who just happen to speak two languages”

Rates and working conditions

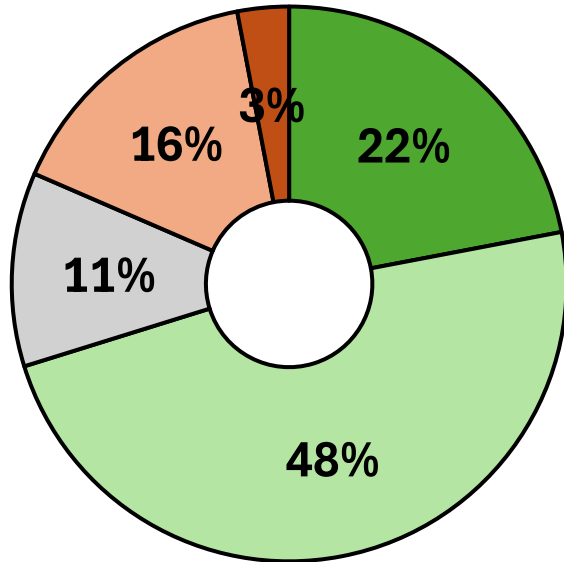
71% believe that working conditions will deteriorate slightly or significantly

“**Clients expect perfection with any deadline at any price.** Sometimes it is simply impossible [and] achieving it means you spend considerable unpaid time on the task.”

“**Having to work a lot more, with tighter deadlines and less support, for the same amount of money.**”

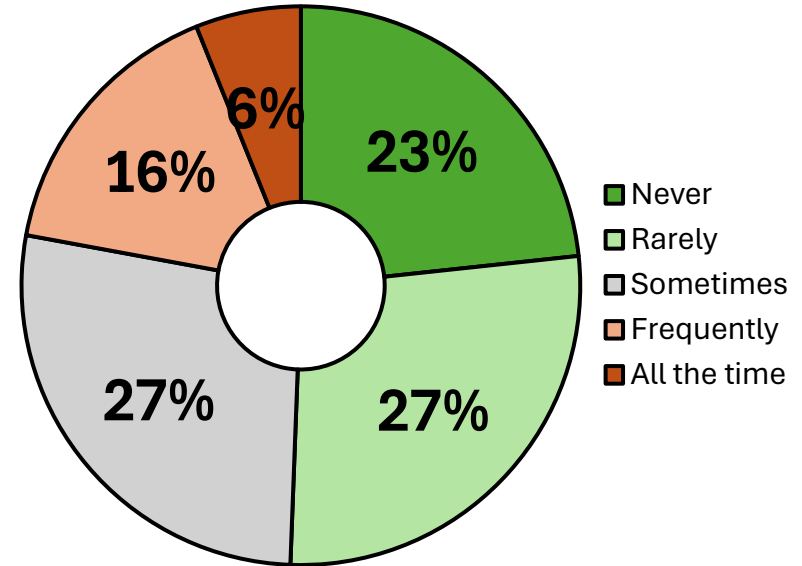
Tensions

How fulfilling is your freelance translation career?



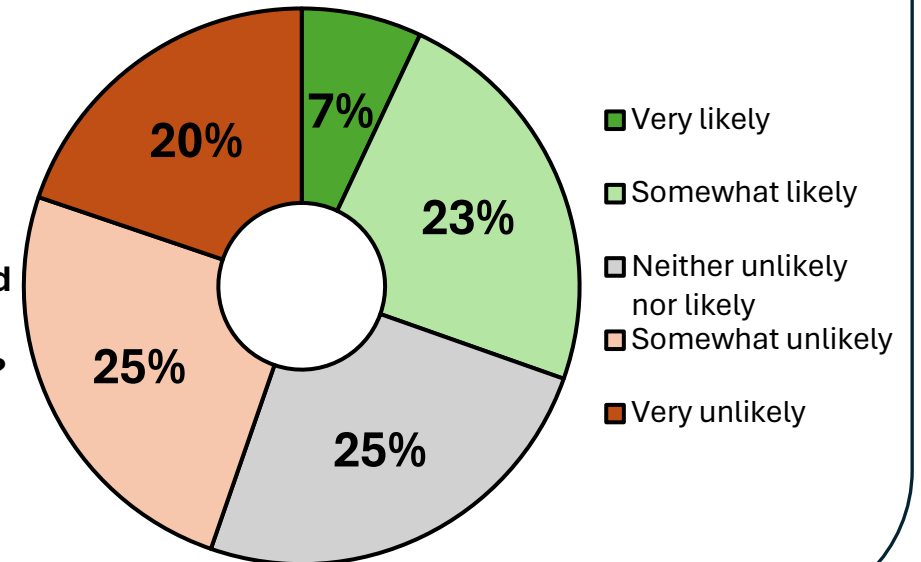
- Very fulfilling
- Somewhat fulfilling
- Neither unfulfilling nor fulfilling
- Somewhat unfulfilling
- Very unfulfilling

How often do you think about leaving translation?



- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Frequently
- All the time

How likely would you be to recommend a career as a freelance translator?



- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neither unlikely nor likely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

Tipping points

“I love translating. I can't see myself doing anything else really.”

“I really enjoy translation. When I'm translating, I feel happy.”

“I enjoy the job immensely.”

“I would absolutely recommend translation as a career, with the caveat that it may no longer be the same well-paid profession that it used to be.”

“I feel fulfilled in my work. Always new challenges. It requires concentration and discipline.”

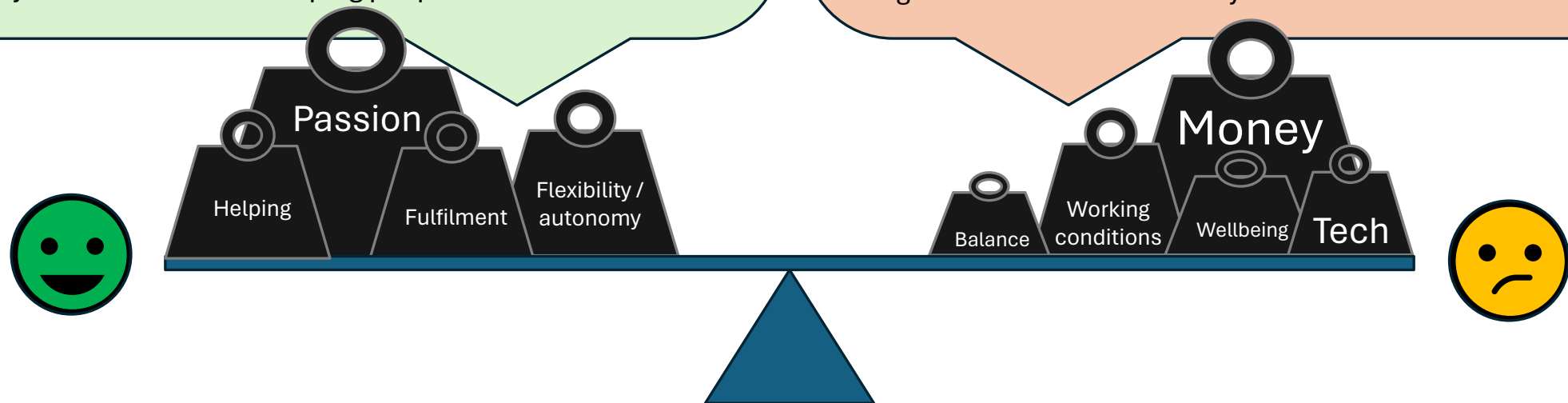
“I find joy and satisfaction in helping people communicate.”

“Worth mentioning that these responses have only really been the case in the last few years. Before that, was jogging along just fine.”

“I think MT will have either killed the translation profession within 5-10 years or made it very underpaid.”

“The overriding reason for me wishing to leave the profession is pay. However, I have also experienced physical issues [...] due to working too intensively in order to meet deadlines.”

“I am currently planning to leave translation. [...] I love the actual translation work [...] But it's too difficult to make a living [...]. I think I would be earning a lot more with my qualifications and experience in another industry, AND I'd be getting other benefits too [...]. I don't see a long-term future in this industry.”



Retaining Human Capital



The screenshot shows the top of a Slator article. On the left is the Slator logo with the tagline 'Language Industry Intelligence'. To the right are 'Subscribe' and 'Sign In' buttons. Below the logo, it says 'Industry News · By Maria Stasimioti On 23 Feb 2022'. The main headline reads: 'More Visibility, Better Recognition Are Key for Translators — EU Council Report'.

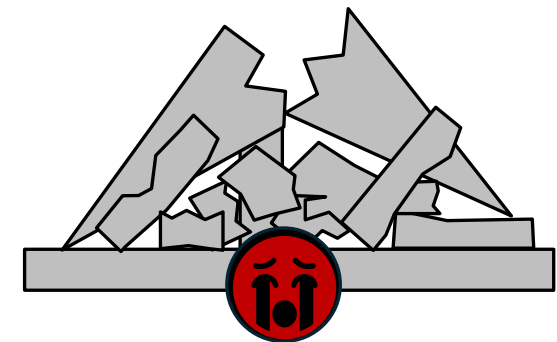
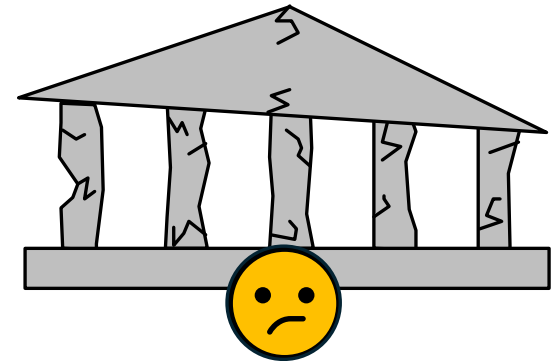
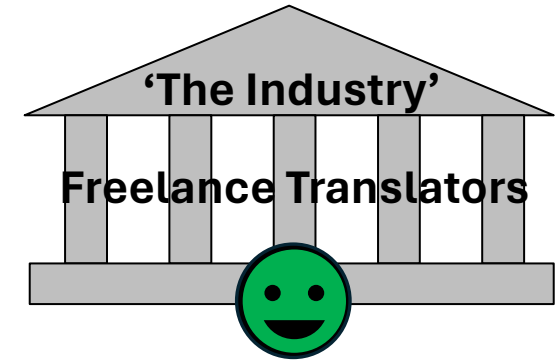


The screenshot shows the top of a The Observer article. It features the 'The Observer Television' logo. The main headline is 'Where have all the translators gone?'. Below the headline, a sub-headline reads: 'The global audience for foreign-language streaming shows has never been larger. But subtitlers are leaving the industry in droves'.

- “**the pipeline of linguistic talent [...]** is currently **insufficient** to meet the needs of public services and business.” (CIOL 2020)
- “While talk of a talent shortage in the language industry is nothing new, it appears to have reached a **boiling point.**” (Nimdzi 100 2022)
- “Whether the shortage is a result of inadequate **pay, poor work/life balance, lack of educational opportunities** or other reasons, for now it’s the reality that we face.” (RWS 2023, p. 8)
- From 2020-2023, RWS noted a 10% decrease in respondents to their surveys with over 10 years’ experience. They attributed this to a combination of a **generation of translators starting to retire** and the usual industry churn.

‘Professional conservation’

- Many translators are happy and thriving in spite of the challenges that exist
- For some, a “**labour of love**”
- Positive ‘pulls’ can only go so far
- Emerging challenges likely to exacerbate certain problems
- **Happier, healthier translators = healthy industry**
- Need to ‘lighten the load’ to confront these challenges and limit their influence



Transparency

- Open debate paves the way for developments
- Transparency needed at multiple levels:
 - In the classroom
 - In industry/research publications
 - On a professional level
 - More voices from across the industry – positive and negative
- A shared ethical responsibility to protect the longer-term health of the profession

Show me the money:

Bringing pay, rate-setting, and financial sustainability into the translation classroom

1. *The Great Divide(s)*

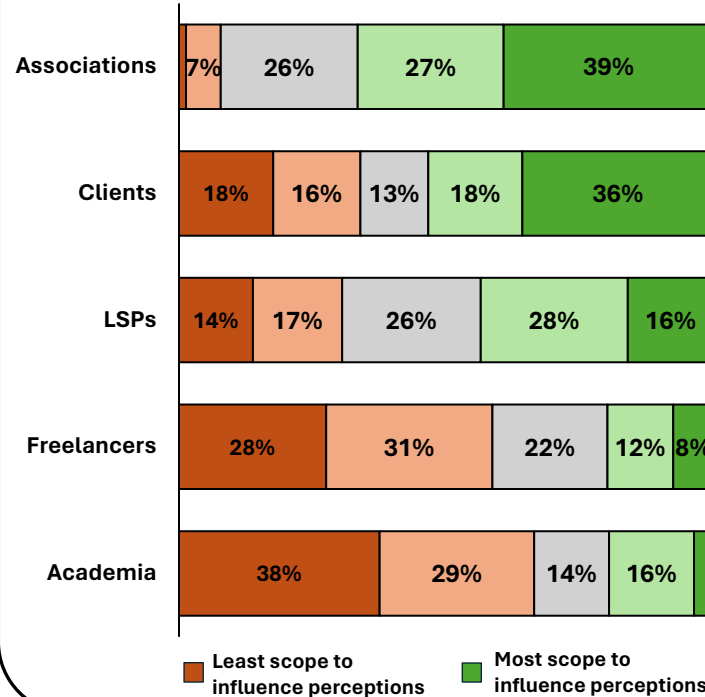
Money matters. In a survey of ~1,500 freelance translators, low rates of pay was by far the biggest challenge facing translators (59% of respondents, Inbox Translation, 2020). And yet, wider forecasts show sustained growth in the language industry, reaching \$64.7 billion in 2022 and forecast to grow to \$90.8 by 2027 (Nimdzi, 2023). This stark contrast in outlooks gives cause for concern, given that translation and localization make up 43% of the market.¹ Although disruptors such as new technologies and platforms, and issues of status are among key factors exacerbating this contrast, Translation Studies (TS) and translator training still have a part to play.

1. [https://www.inboxtranslation.com/blog/industry-forecast-2023-2027](#)



Being valued

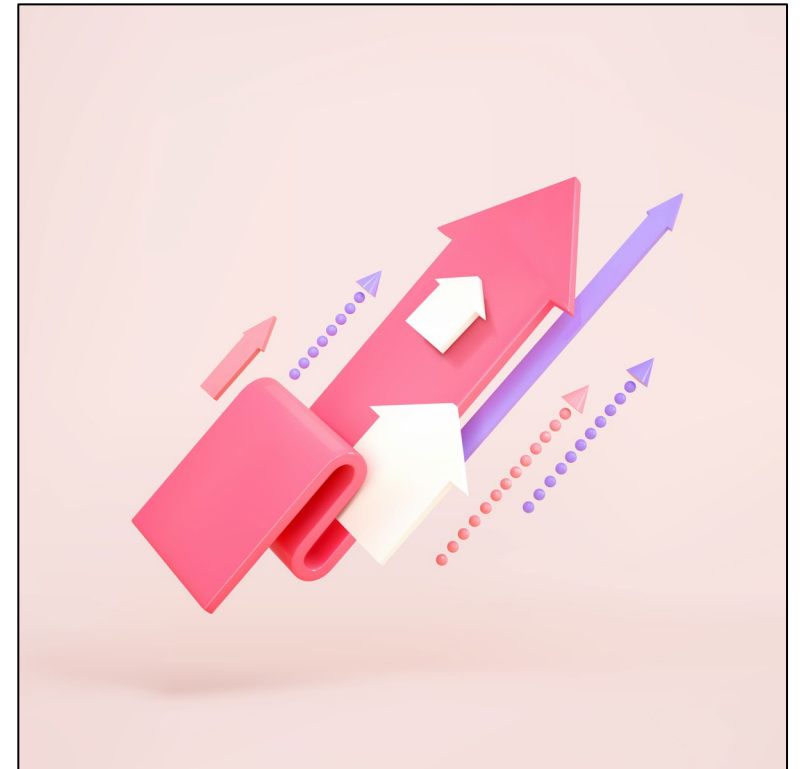
Who has the most scope to influence the ways in which translators are perceived in society?



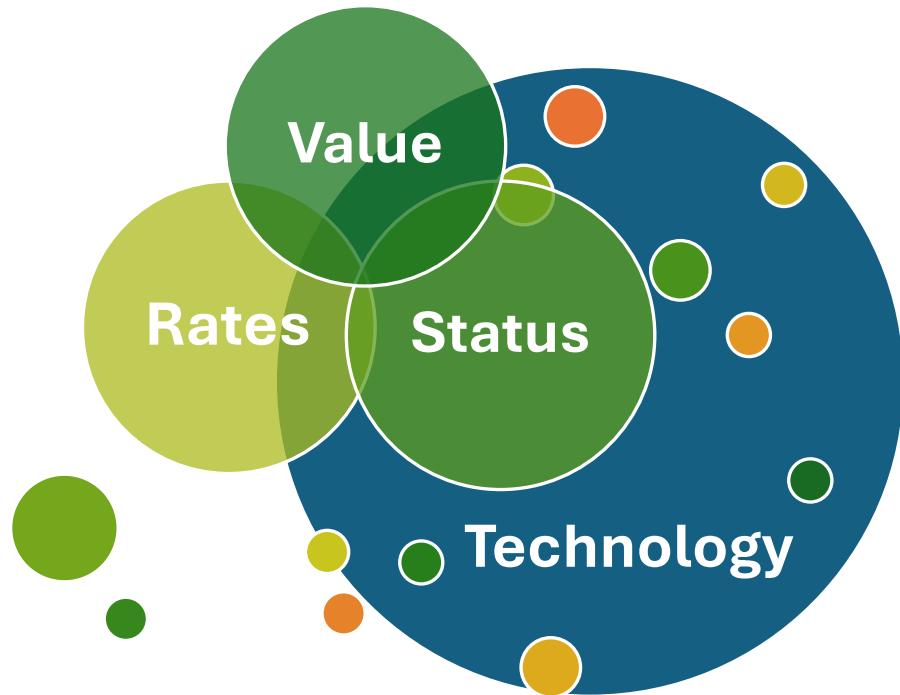
- About status and perceptions and understandings of translation
- Different ‘educators’ can play a role in shaping attitudes
- However, it is a complex picture, different actors have varying agency and control:
 - **Associations:** Advocacy, talking to buyers, keep pushing for recognition/awareness
 - **Clients:** Have significant agency, but hard to reach in bulk
 - **LSPs:** Constitute both supply and demand. LSPs need to do more to “earn their keep”
 - **Freelancers:** limited agency, though direct clients allow a direct relationship and point of contact
 - **Academic institutions:** limited agency in isolation but collaboration is prized

Adding value

- Better selling/**communicating the value of translation** to potential clients
- Target domains that maximise the need for **the human touch**
- **Specialisation**
- Cater for different **market segments** and excel at different things
- Continue **developing skills** that are critical to maintaining our edge and value: e.g. **target language skills**
- **Mode of rate calculation**: think beyond the per-word model
- Other added-value services



(Dis)entangling rates, status, and technology



- Tech sits behind everything
- Status can't be detached from rates
- Value (perceived value) is linked to status
- Value influences rates
 - No single cause, no single solution
 - But solutions need to operate across multiple areas
 - Increasing the (perceived) status and value of translation can move us forward
- **We all have a role to play**

Questions?

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