



CAT TOOLS

2023

an industry report from
ProZ.com

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INDUSTRY REPORTS

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Intro



The boss said they were going to be talking about CAT tools, so here I am, reporting for duty. The compulsory cat at a computer, because “CAT” tool...

Ha ha boss, so funny... totally not a cliché...



Bring your cat

The first full ProZ.com report on Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools was published in 2013. In the last ten years, translation-related technology has changed a lot. And more recently, some things have started to change at a pace which can leave your head spinning. But some things have not changed, at the same time. Let's get into it.

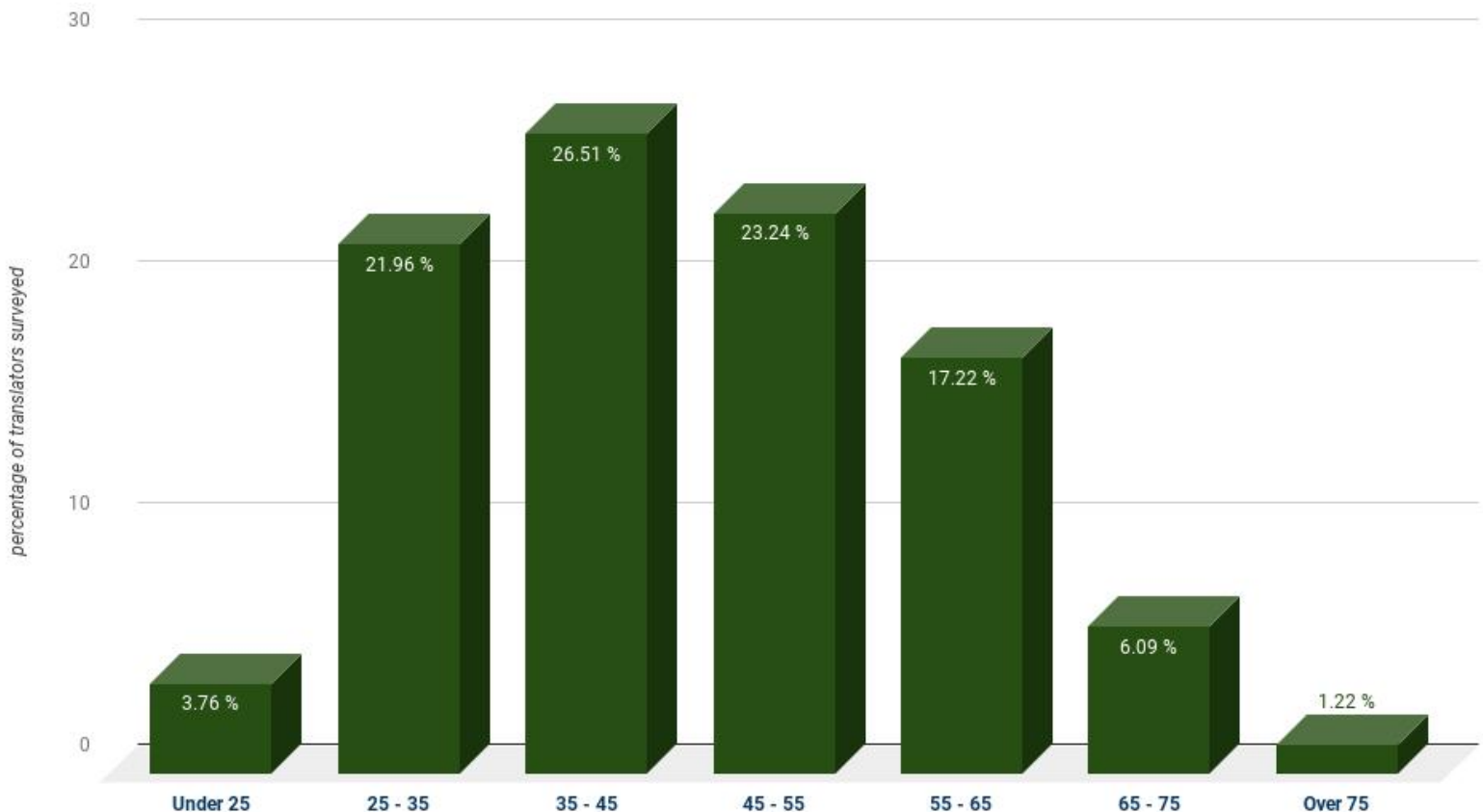
First, a quick look at the professionals who participated in the surveys and conversations that went into making this report. Data gathering focused intentionally on full-time translators. While some respondents to surveys were part-time translators, unless otherwise stated, the information presented here comes from full-time professionals. One reason for this is that the part-time freelancer tends to invest less in such things as tools and training than the freelancer who is “all in”. For example, 93% of full-time translators use a CAT tool, while just under 80% of part-time translators have one. Time and money spent in CAT tool training was likewise much less among those who are translating part time or on the side.

Intro

Age groups were varied, with the largest group being in the 35 to 45 years old range. An older, probably mistaken way of thinking about age in relation to software is that the older the person, the lower the adoption rate or the proficiency in the software might be. But this is not necessarily true. In fact, it appears that older age groups may have an inherent advantage when it comes to CAT tools. Those who are not digital natives, in general, have had to learn to use software which is much less intuitive than much of what exists now, and they had to learn it using means which were much more scarce than what we have access to now. This sets one up for better chances at success in CAT tools, which are often less intuitive and more difficult to become proficient in than more widespread software available nowadays.

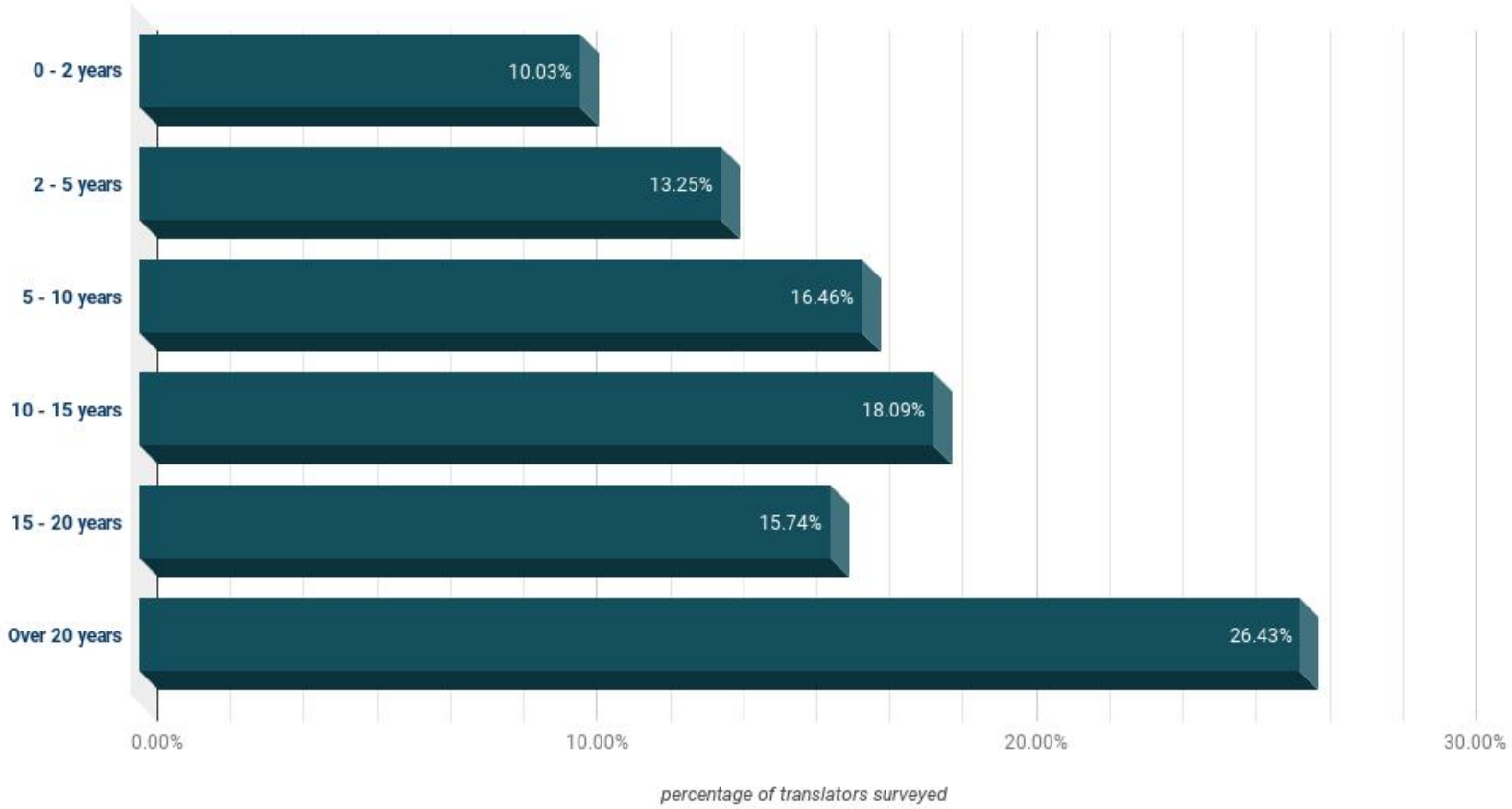
Sixty percent have been in the industry for ten years or more, and the largest group have been at it for twenty years or more, so we're also talking about professionals with a generally high degree of experience and knowledge in the language services game.

Age groups



Intro

Years in the industry as a translator



Oh boy, and there are charts and graphs. So much fun.

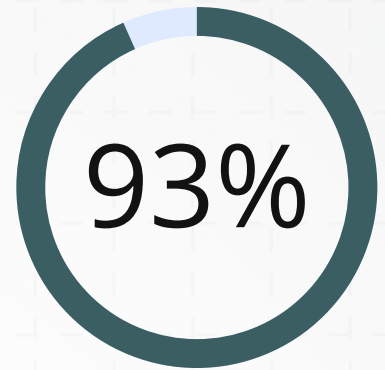
Who does not use a CAT tool

If you are reading this and are a translator, chances are you already use a CAT tool, or are considering using one and need more information, or need to decide where to start, so we won't spend too much time talking about translators who do not use a CAT tool. At different moments in this report they may be used as a point of comparison, but bear in mind that this is a shrinking point of comparison.

At the moment, about 7% of translators do not use a CAT tool at all. Of that 7%, slightly more than half have never tried a CAT tool.

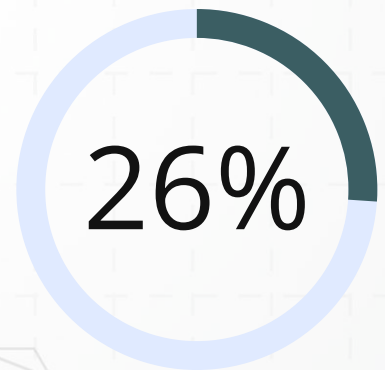
It is possible that some translators do work which, by its very nature, excludes the use of a CAT tool. There was no consensus on any given field of expertise where this is the case. The most notable differences in CAT tool use by subject matter were in the Art/Literary field, and in "General" translations. If you are not specializing, it is likely that it is more difficult to build and maintain translation memories which will increase your efficiency in a CAT tool, if every new translation you start is in a different field. It is also likely, in that case, that your overall efficiency is below what most translators are able to reach on average.

In file types, there was also a noticeable difference between CAT tool users and those who do not use a CAT tool. Among those who do not use a CAT tool, scanned documents or images were more prevalent, as were hardcopy documents.



Talk about CAT people...

7% of full-time translators do not use any CAT tool at all. The other 93% use at least one CAT tool (and very often more than one).



Been around...

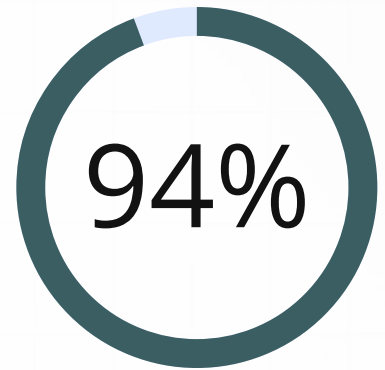
The largest respondent group, at just over 26%, has been in the industry for 20 years or more.

Who uses a CAT tool

Just over 93% of full-time professional translators use at least one CAT tool. Not a surprising percentage, especially if you take into account that ten years ago, the percentage of translators using a CAT tool was already at or above 80%, and the trend has been steadily upward.

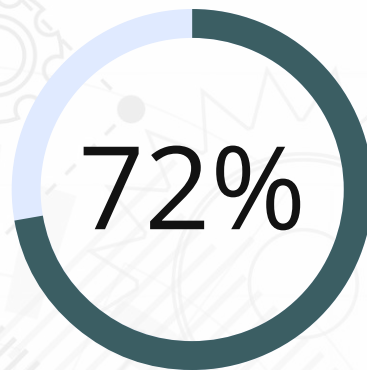
Around 43% of translators asked in 2023 had been using a CAT tool for fewer than 10 years, but that percentage more or less coincides with the segment that has been in the industry for fewer than ten years too. Note that, for many of the statistics we'll see here, we are talking about translators using "at least one CAT tool". As we'll see in a moment, that is because relatively few CAT tool users are using just one.

And it's not necessarily the case that you either use a CAT tool or you don't use a CAT tool. Around 30% of translators say that they use their CAT tools for *all* of their work. Close to 60% say they use their CAT tools for most of their work, but not all of it.



I've got a better way

Of the translators who use CAT tools, 94% agree that using a CAT tool helps them translate more efficiently.

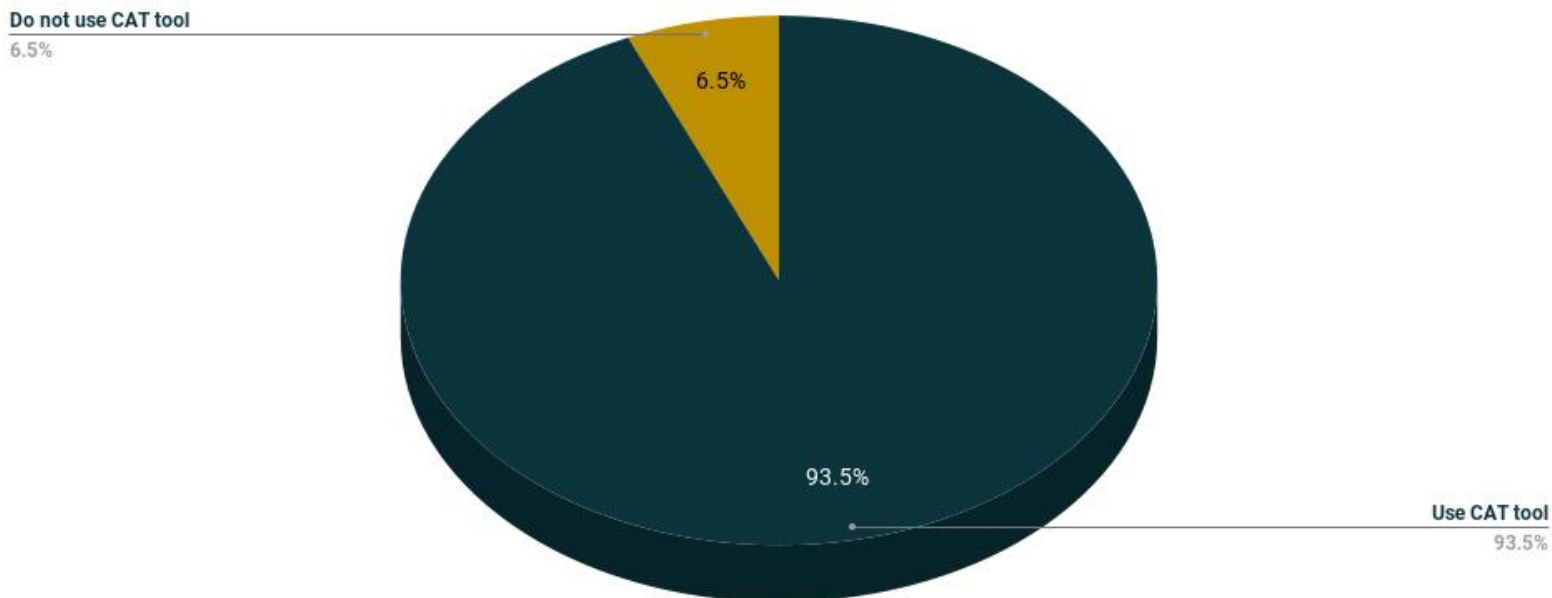


Get things done

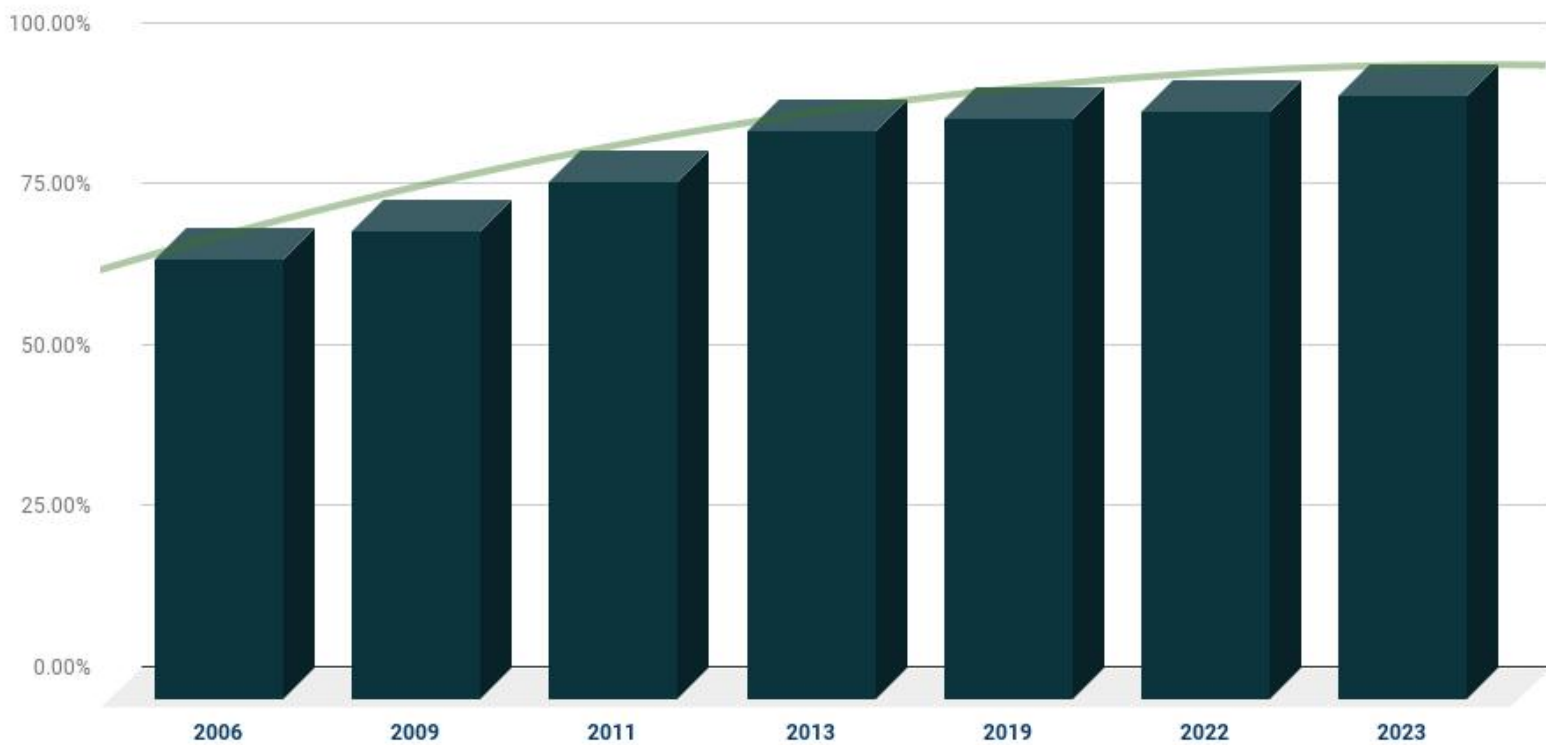
Translators using CAT tools report an average increase in productivity of 72%.

Who uses a CAT tool

Full-time translators: do you use at least one CAT tool?

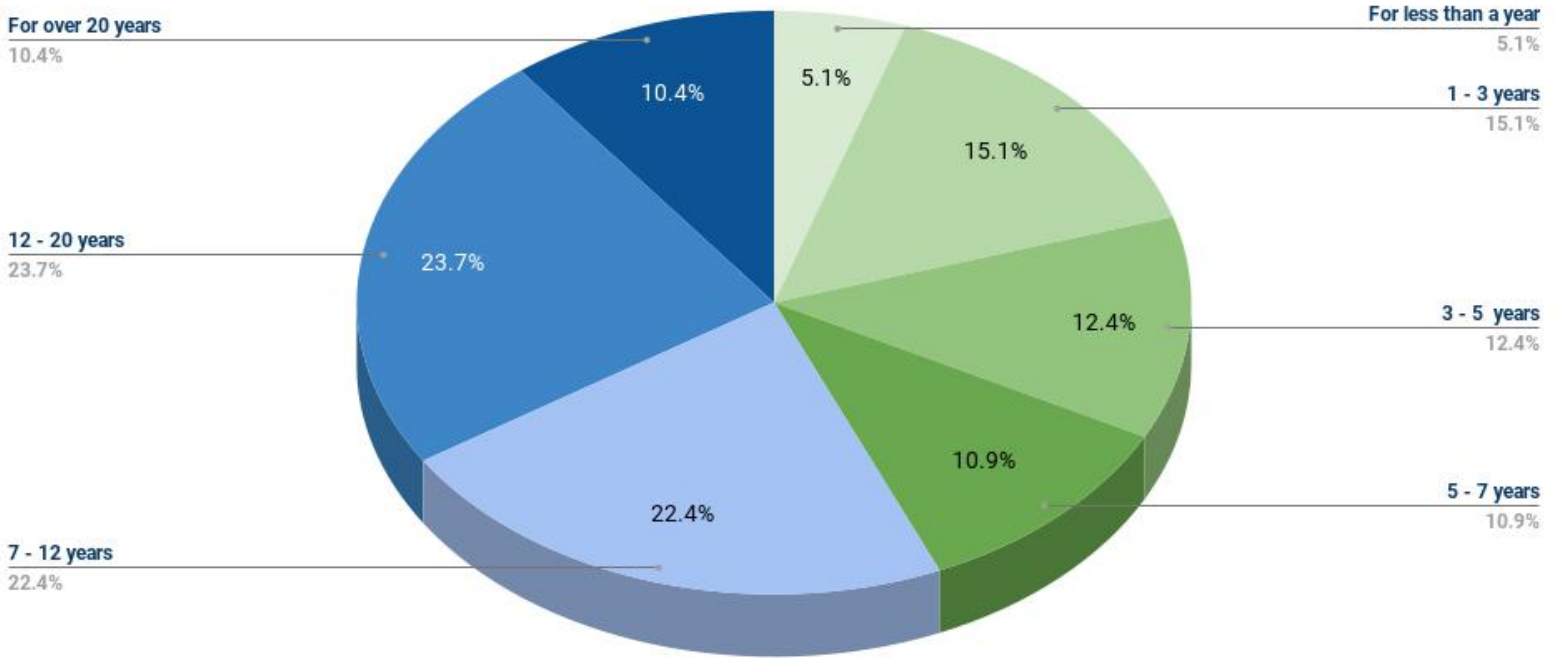


Translators using at least one CAT tool

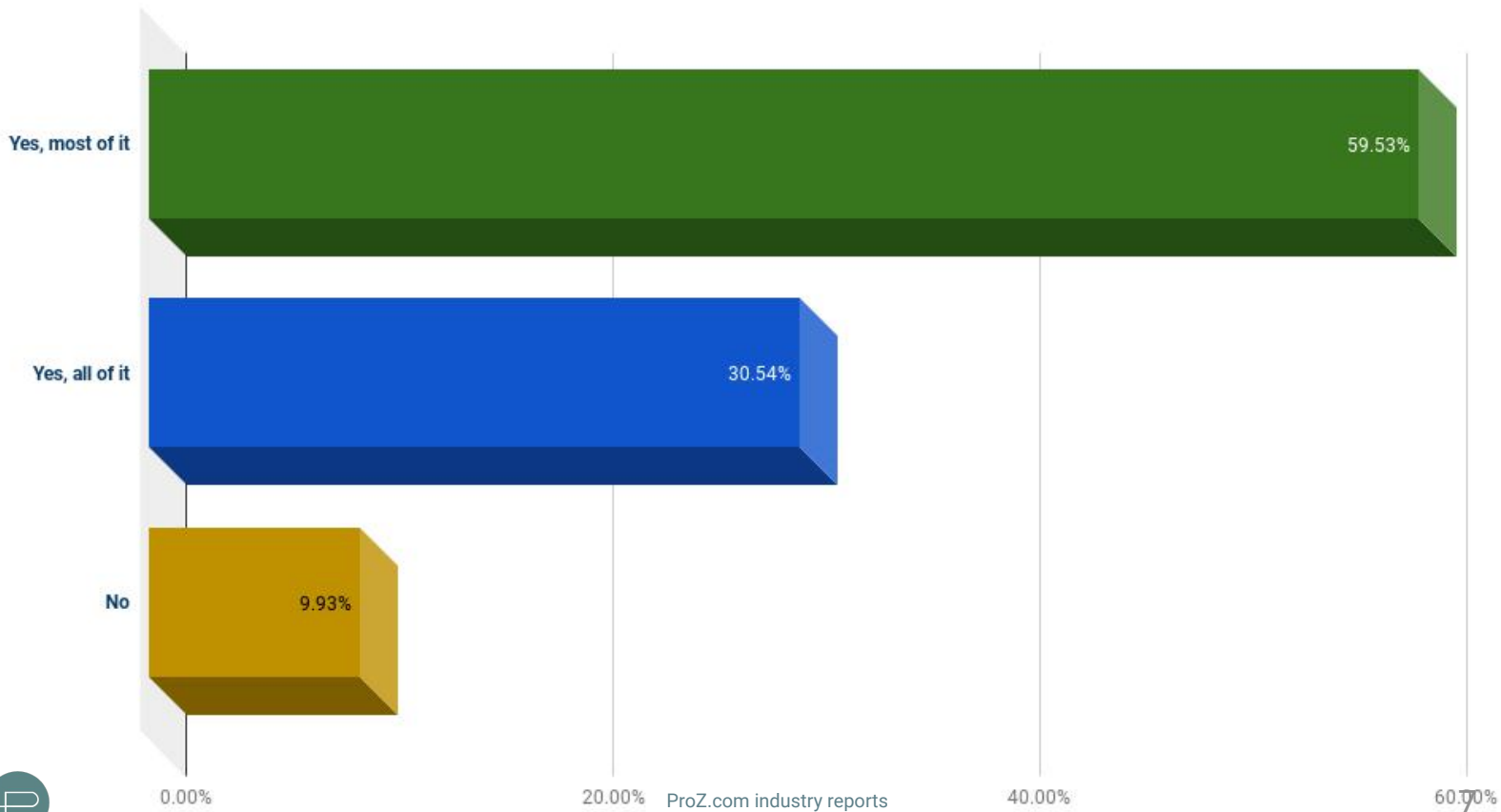


Who uses a CAT tool

How long have you been using a CAT tool (not necessarily the same one)?

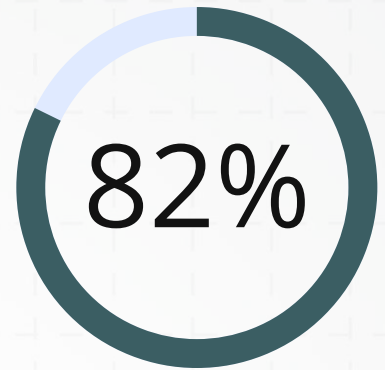


Do you use a CAT tool for most, or all of your translation work?



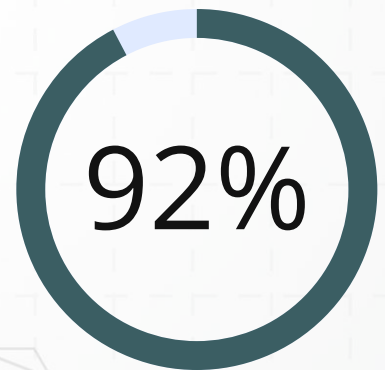
Yes, but in my field...

Does the field in which you specialize determine whether you use a CAT tool? Not particularly. Some subject matters have been traditionally held up as unsuitable CAT tool material, but there were no fields reported among non-CAT tool users which were exclusive to them. The only fields provided by translators surveyed where there were not groups of both users and non-users were Tourism and Video games, where the respondents were all CAT tool users. Those fields, and Business, Medical, Marketing, and Tech are dominated by CAT tool users, while non-CAT tool users were a bit more prevalent in fields like Social Sciences, Art/Literature, and Law.



Almost all the amenities

Among CAT tool users, the average amount of work done on a CAT tool is 82%.

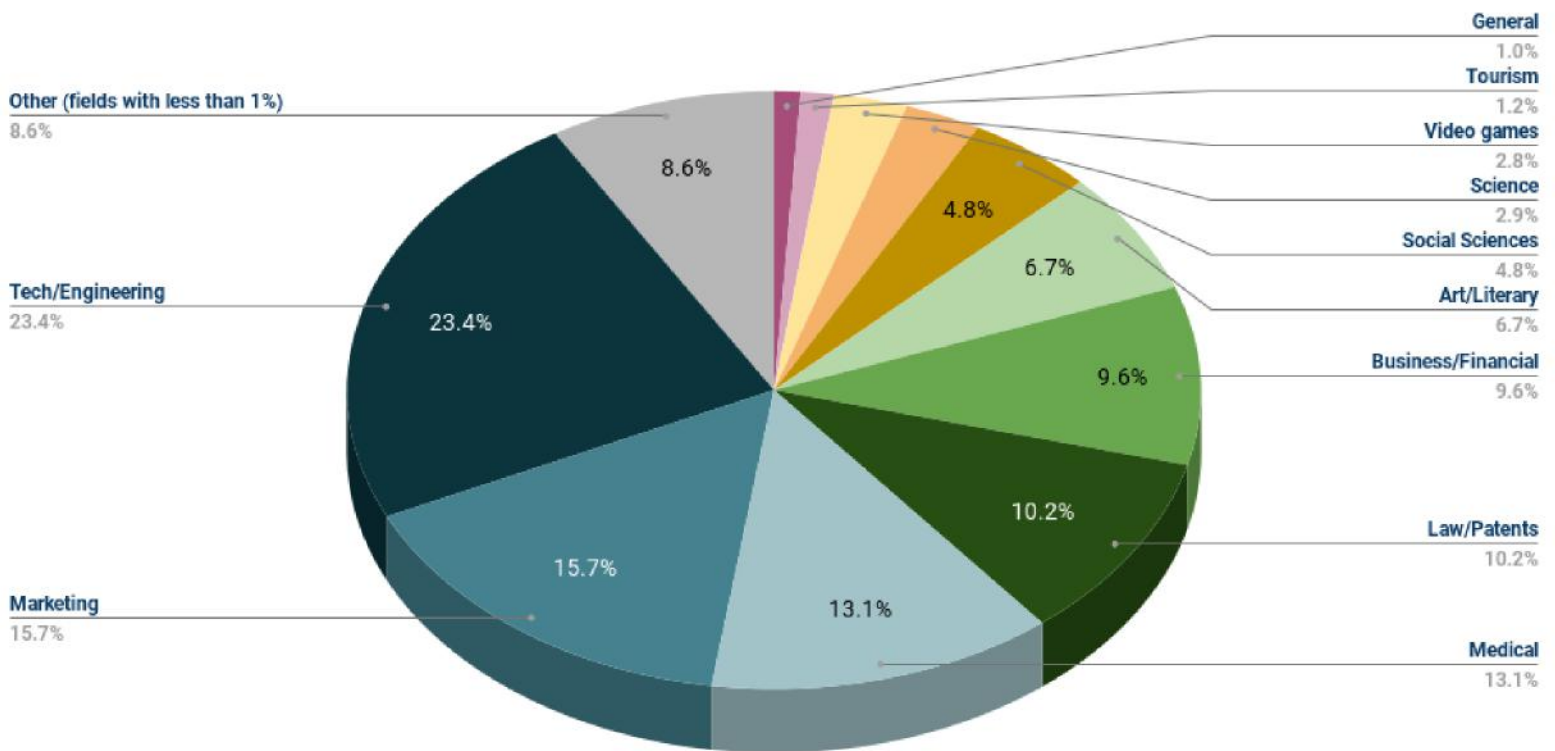


Swiss Army Translator

The percentage of translators using more than one CAT tool is up from 76% in 2013, to 92%.

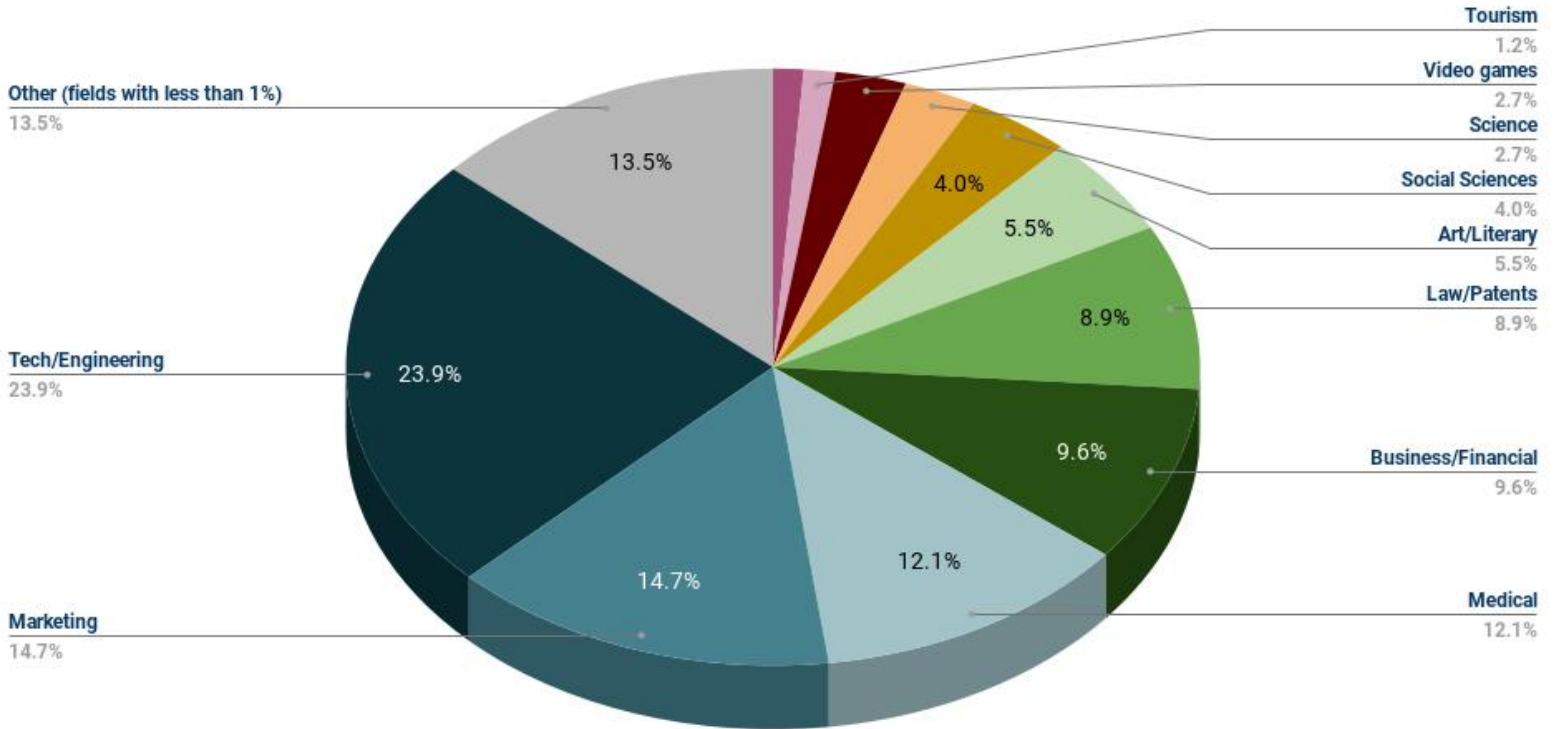
Yes, but in my field...

Main fields of expertise

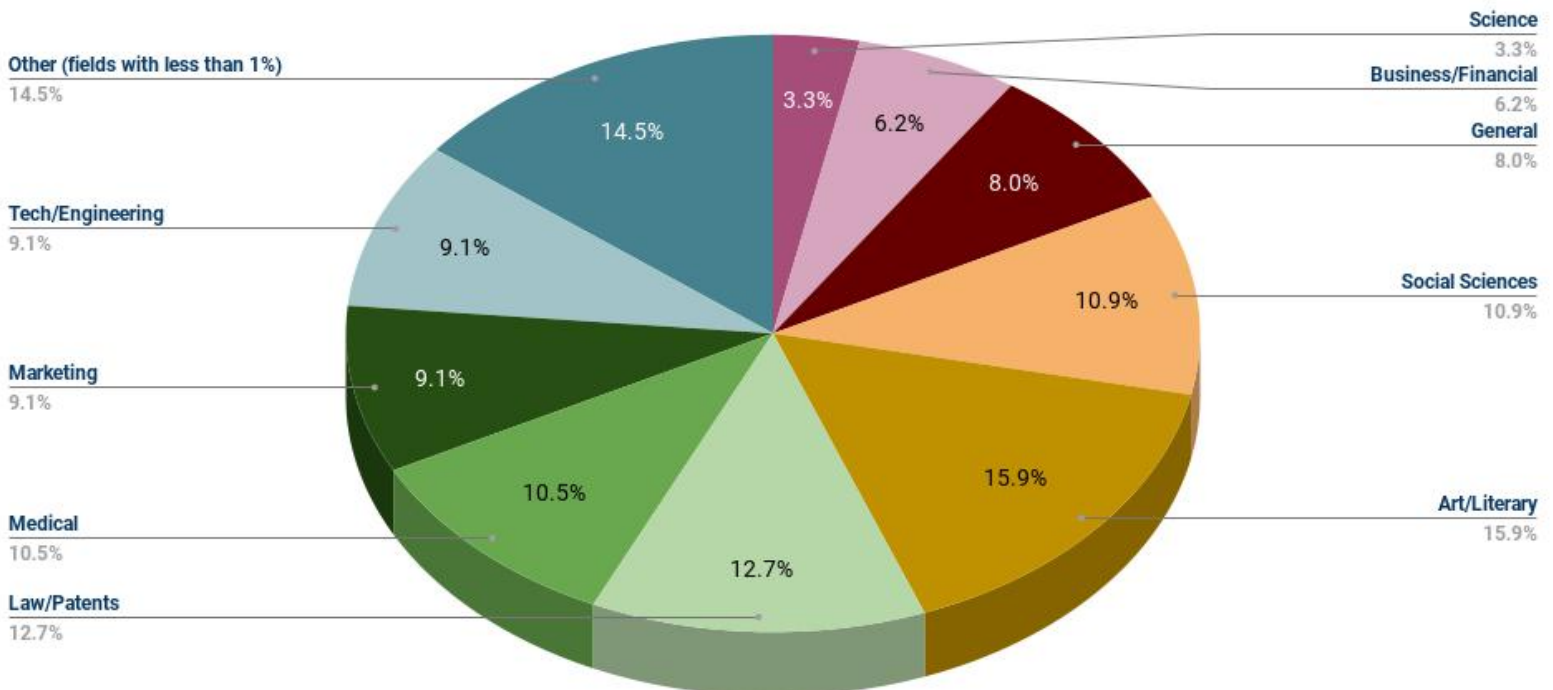


Yes, but in my field...

Main fields of expertise: translators using at least one CAT tool



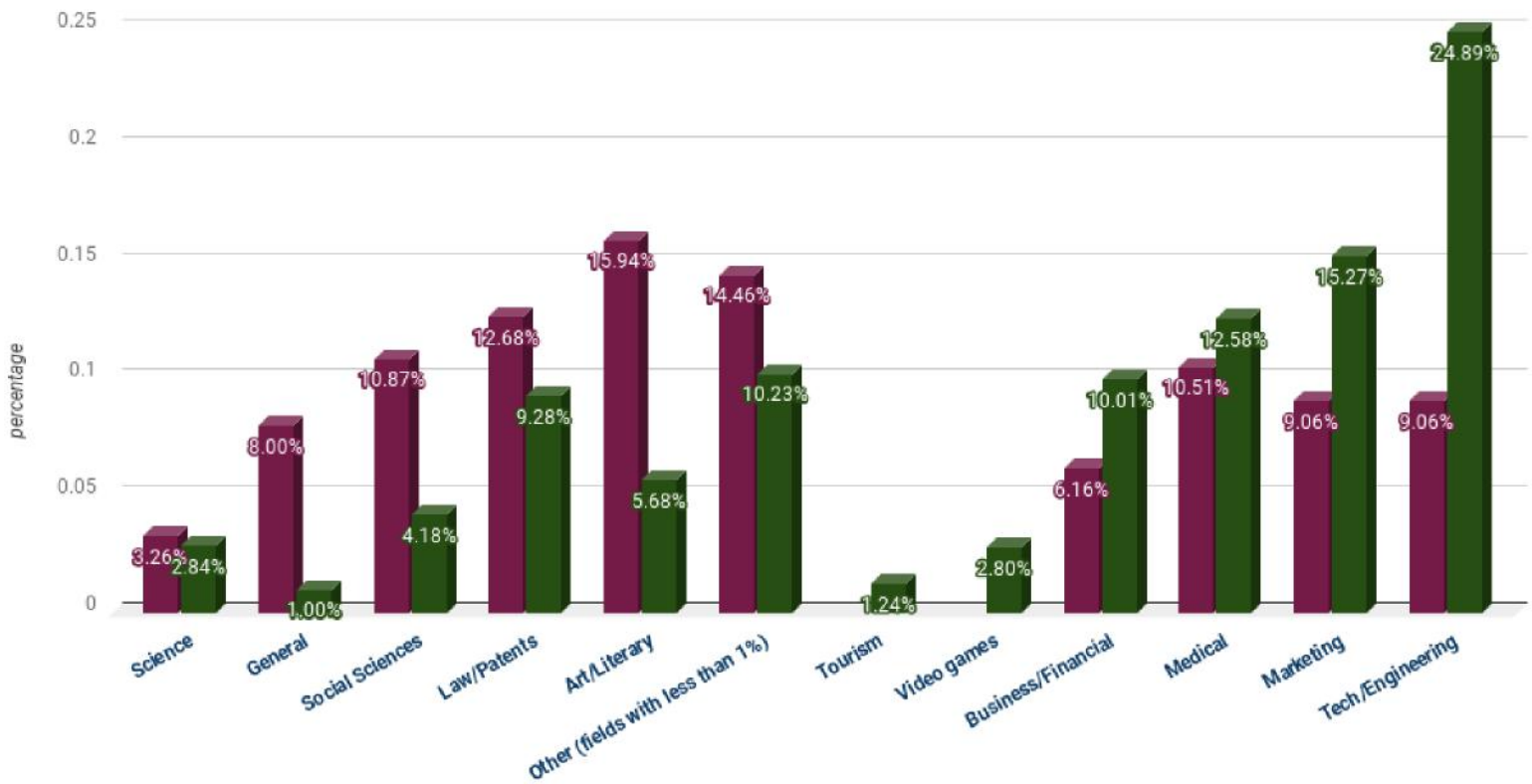
Main fields of expertise: translators not using a CAT tool



Yes, but in my field...

Main fields of expertise: translators using a CAT tool vs. those who are not

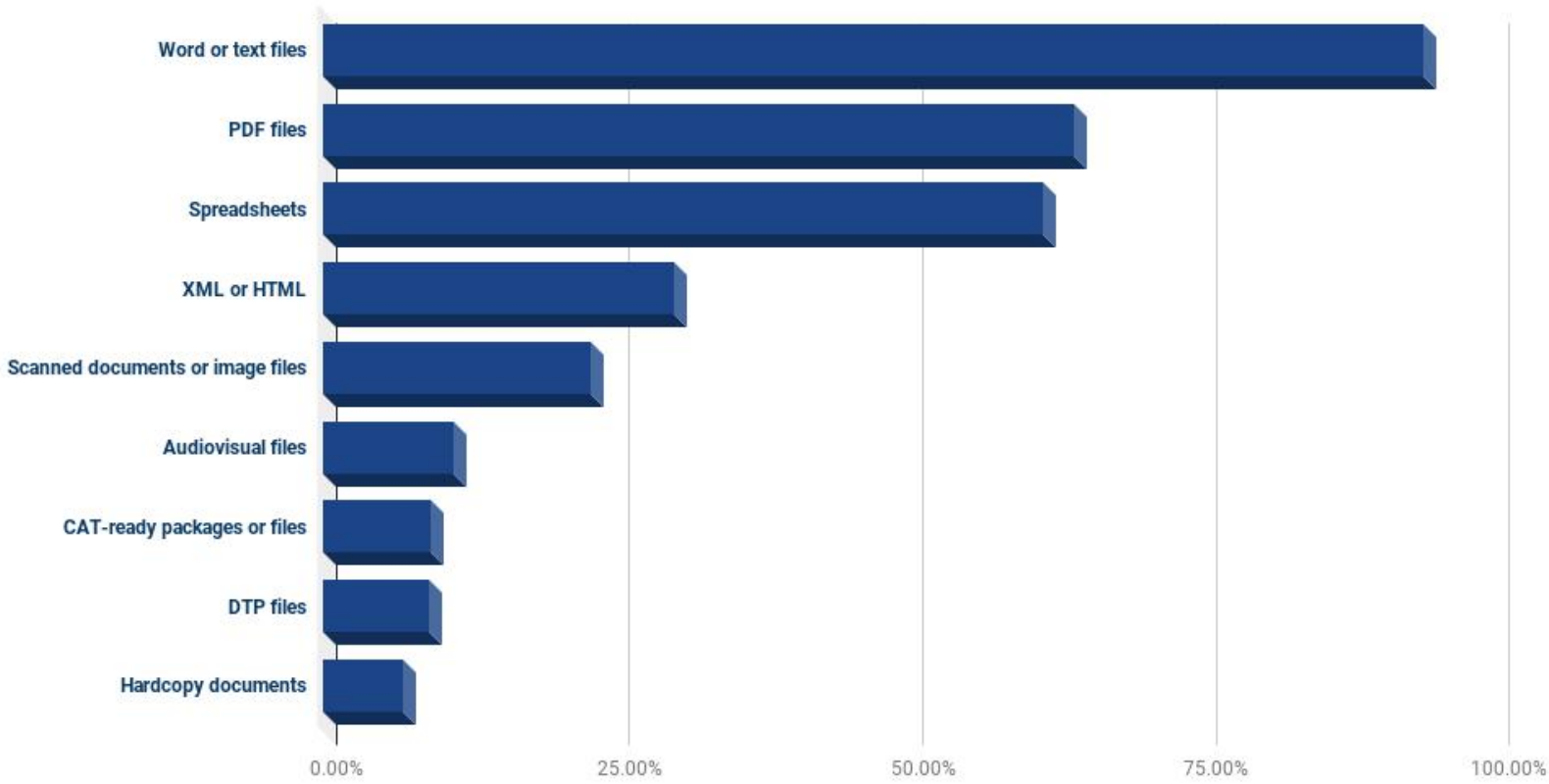
■ Translators NOT using a CAT tool ■ Translators using a CAT tool



Yes, but in my field...

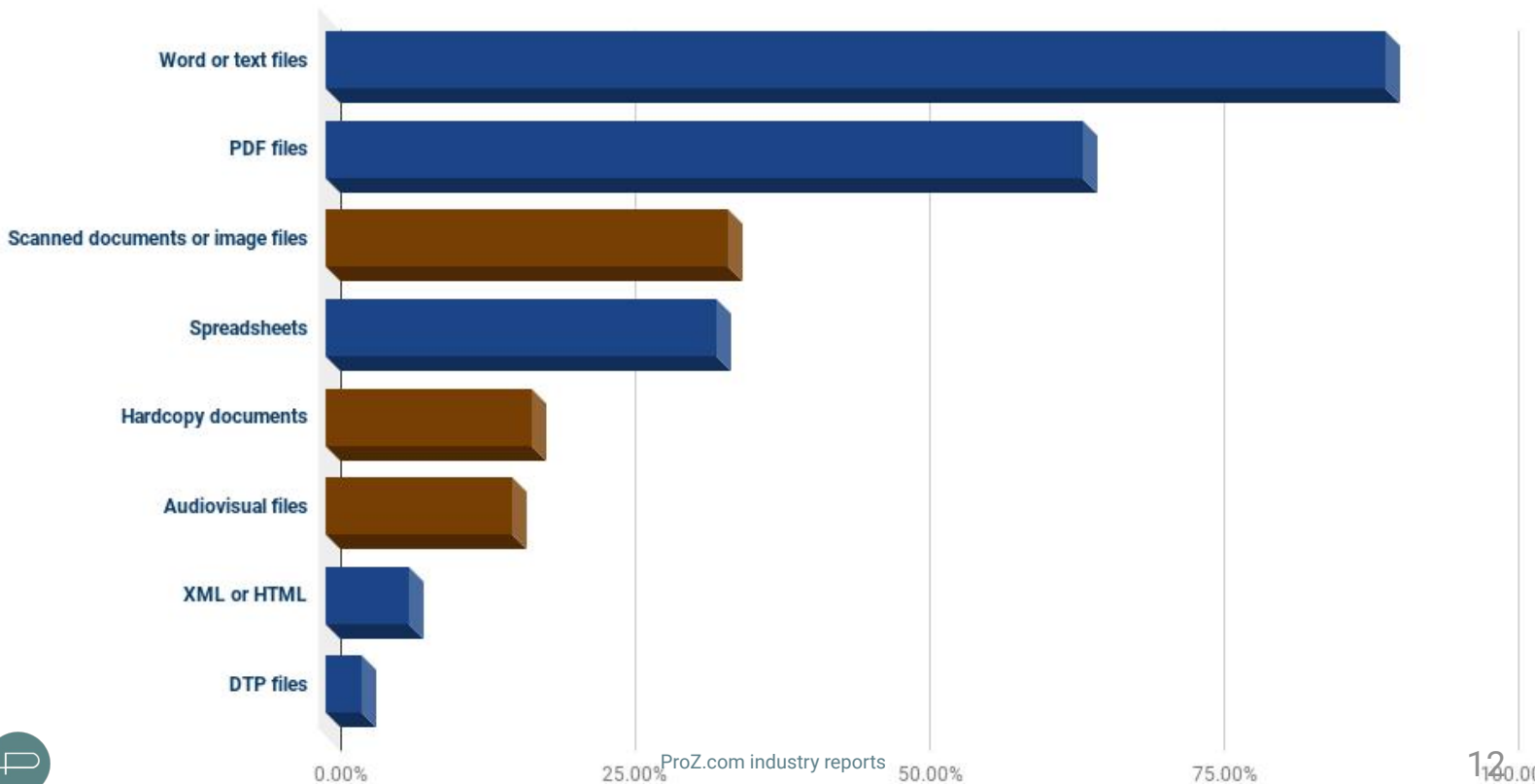
Which are the most common file types you work with?

translators who use a CAT tool



Which are the most common file types you work with?

translators who do not use a CAT tool

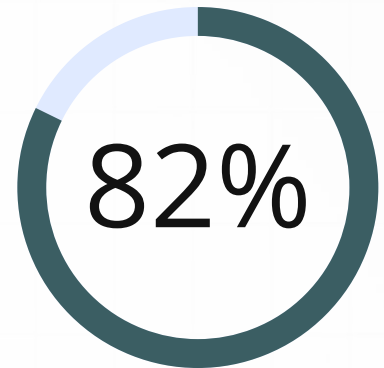


Ten years on...

comparisons with the 2013 report

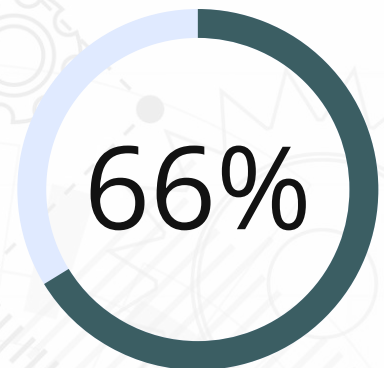
The big players in CAT tools in 2013 are still with us in 2023, but in some cases you will see that popularity and use have changed. MemoQ has moved from third into second position as the most reported CAT tool, for example. Tools such as XTM, MetaTaxis, and Wordbee made interesting jumps in the percentages of translators reporting using them. And Memsources, which was relatively very new to the game in 2013, has moved up most notably since then, going on to occupy third place as the most widely-reported CAT tool.

Another interesting change has been the percentage of translators using just one CAT tool. Now more than ever, translators find themselves using more than one CAT tool as they move from job to job or client to client...



I'll be watching you

At least 82% of translators (CAT tool users or no) monitor their productivity in some way (how else do you know what it takes to get a job done on time?)

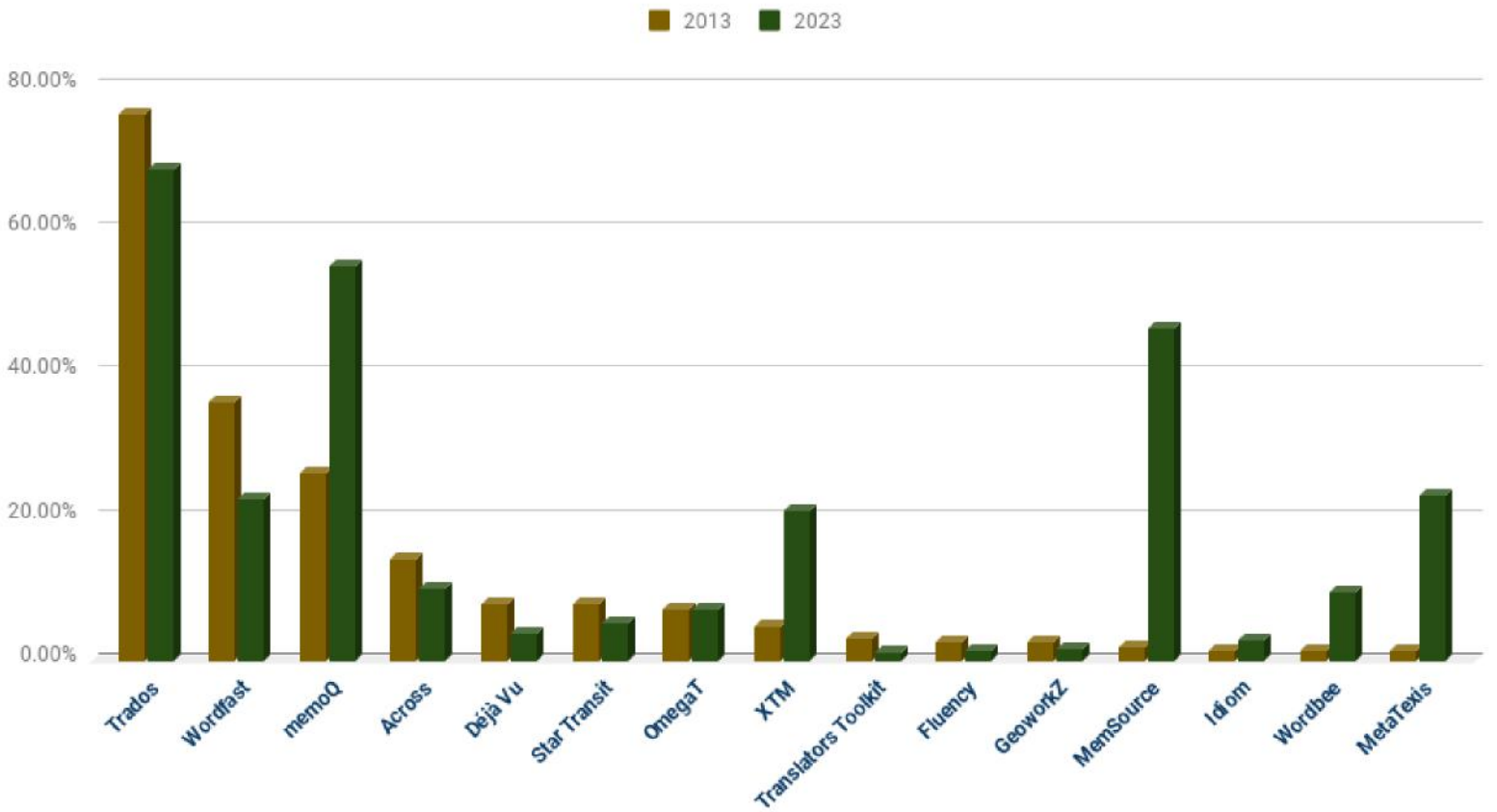


They told me to do it

Translators report that, on average, 66% of their clients require the use of a CAT tool.

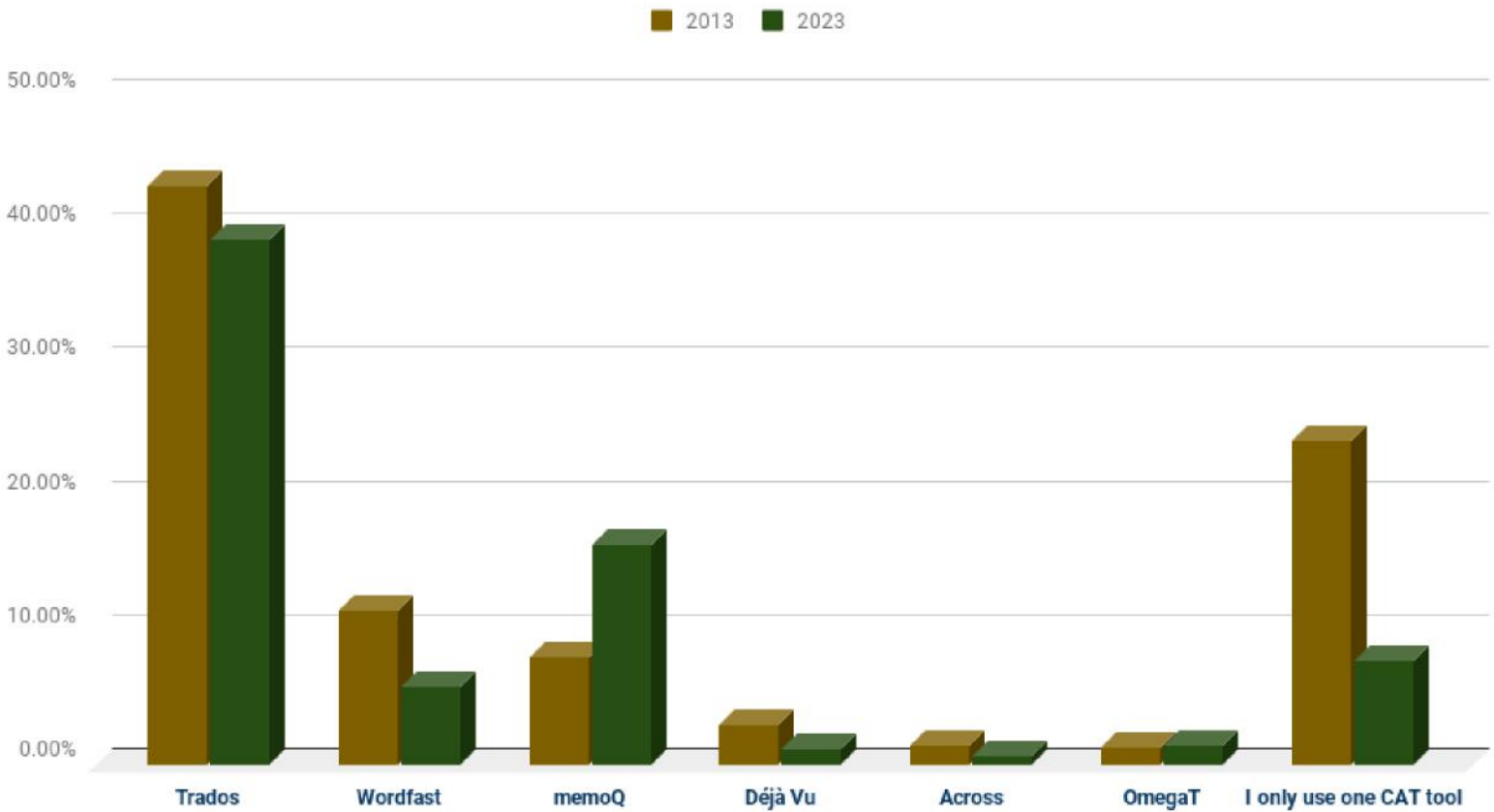
Comparisons with the 2013 report

Which CAT tool(s) do you use? (2013 to 2023 comparison)



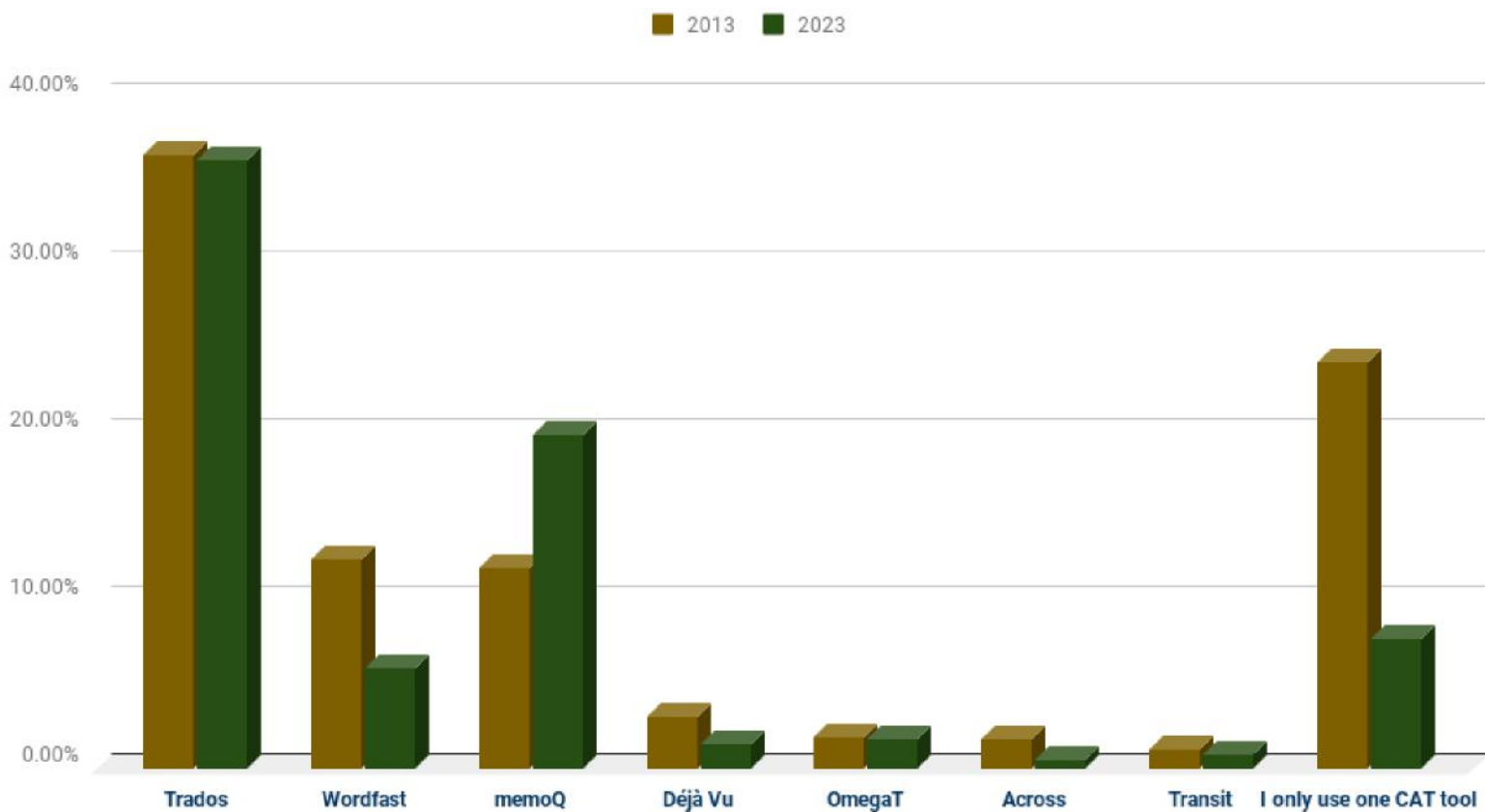
Comparisons with the 2013 report

Which CAT tool do you use the most? (2013 to 2023 comparison)



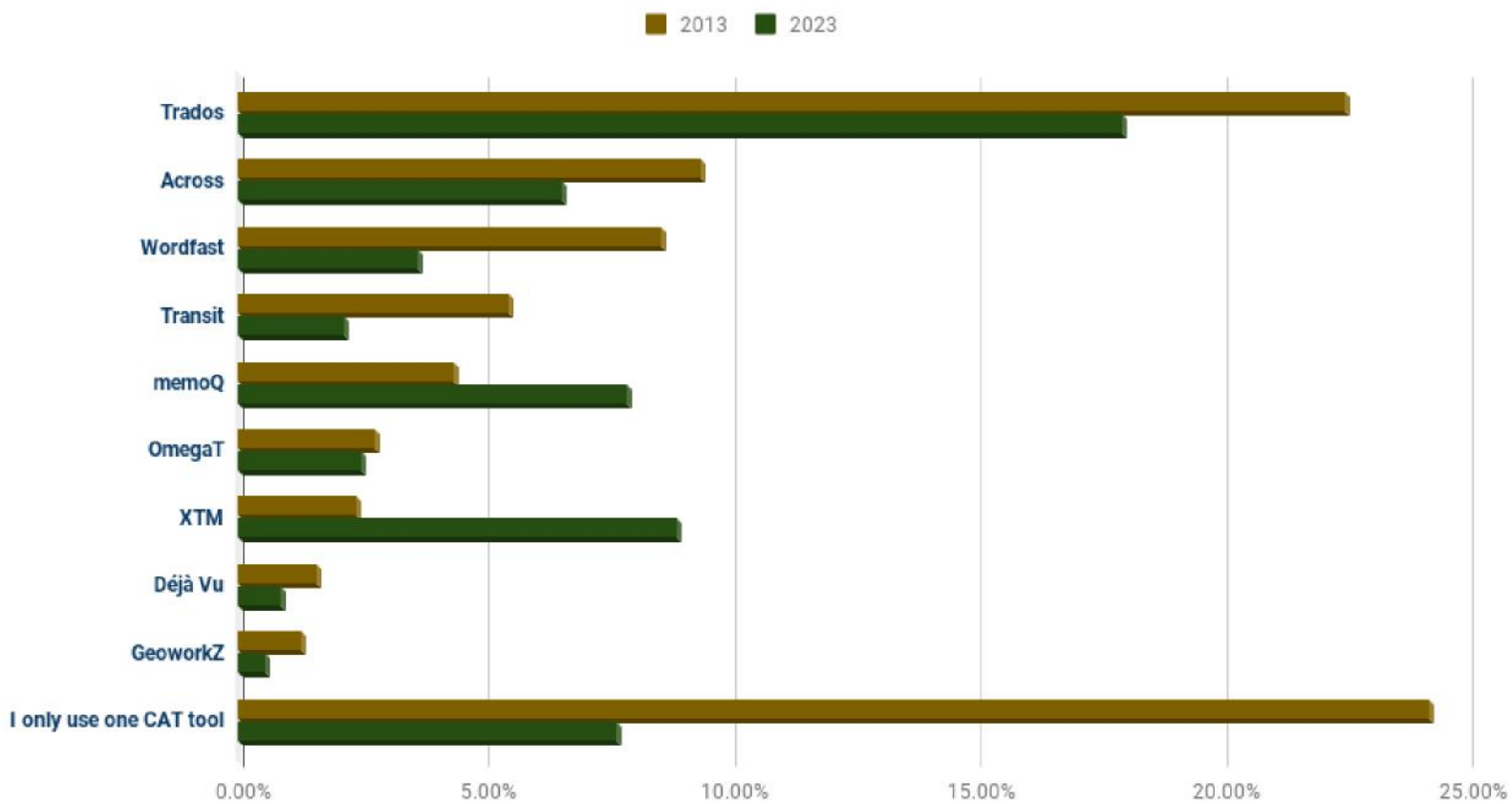
Comparisons with the 2013 report

Favorite CAT tool to use (2013 to 2023 comparison)



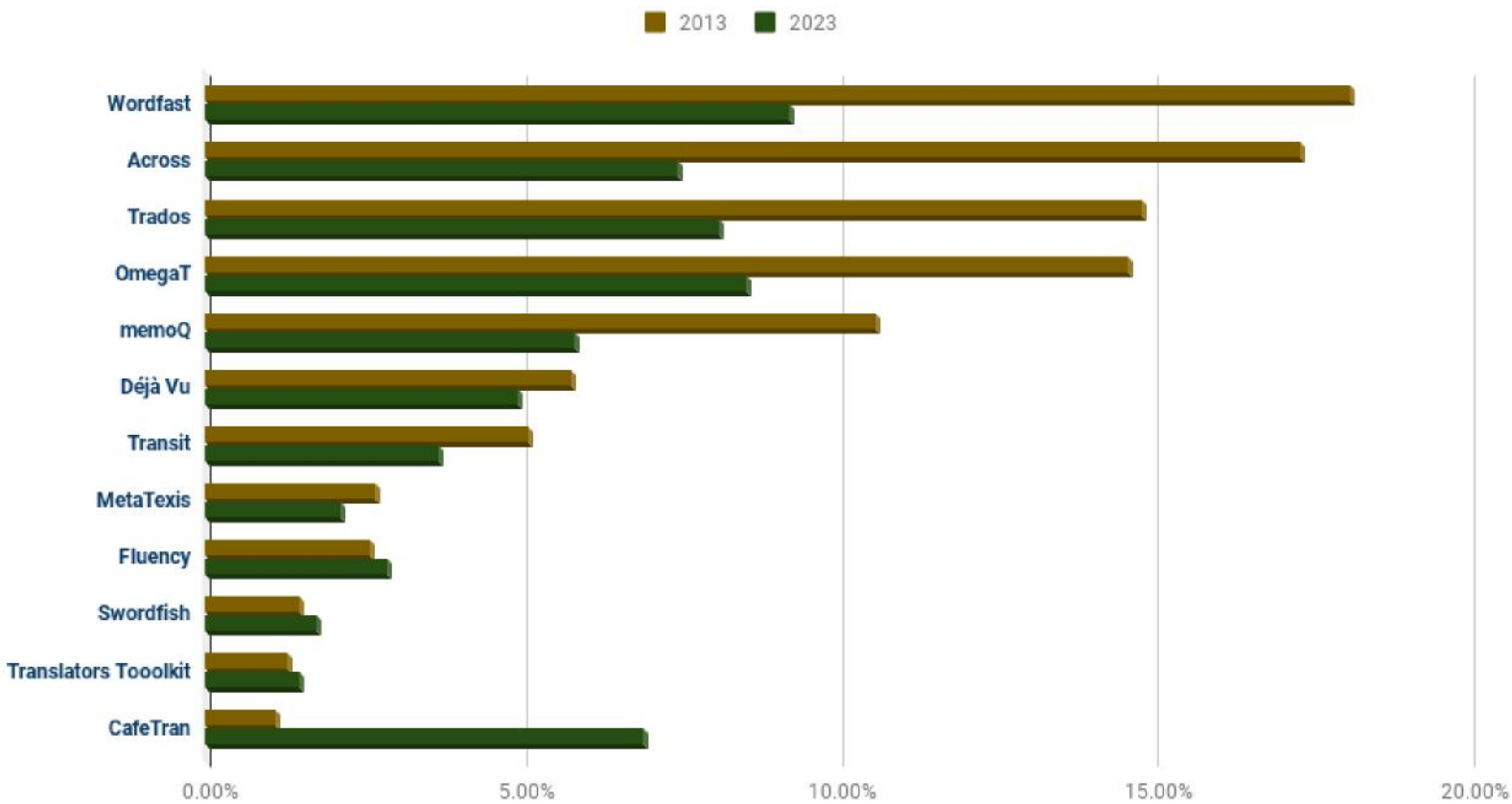
Comparisons with the 2013 report

Least favorite CAT tool (2013 to 2023 comparison)



Comparisons with the 2013 report

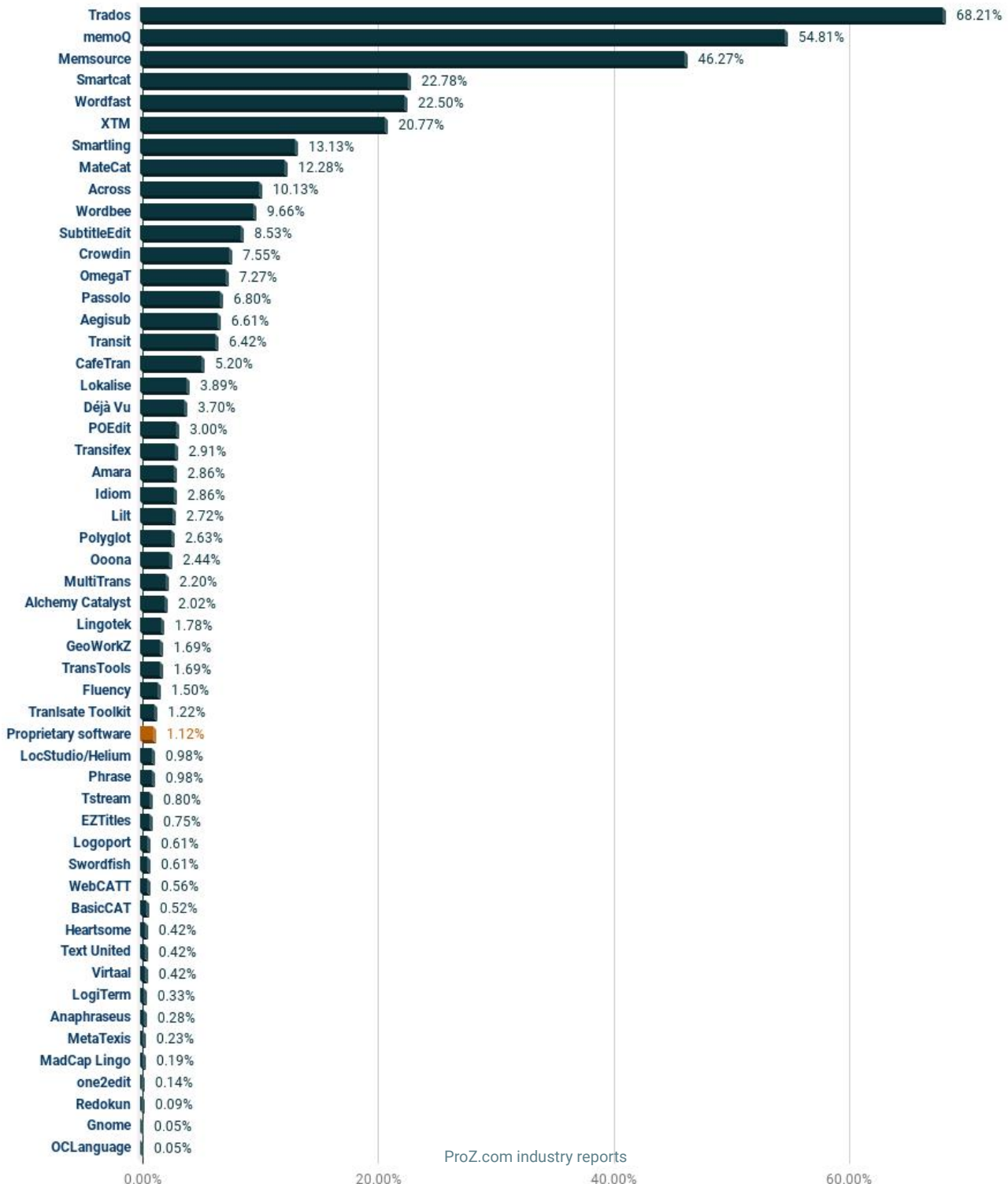
Do you own a CAT tool you do not use? (2013 to 2023 comparison)



Top tools in 2023

Below, you will see a breakdown of the most-used CAT tools as of 2023, as reported by translators. Bear in mind that, as we just mentioned, many translators are using more than one CAT tool, and for this breakdown, we are looking at simply how widely their use was reported among translators.

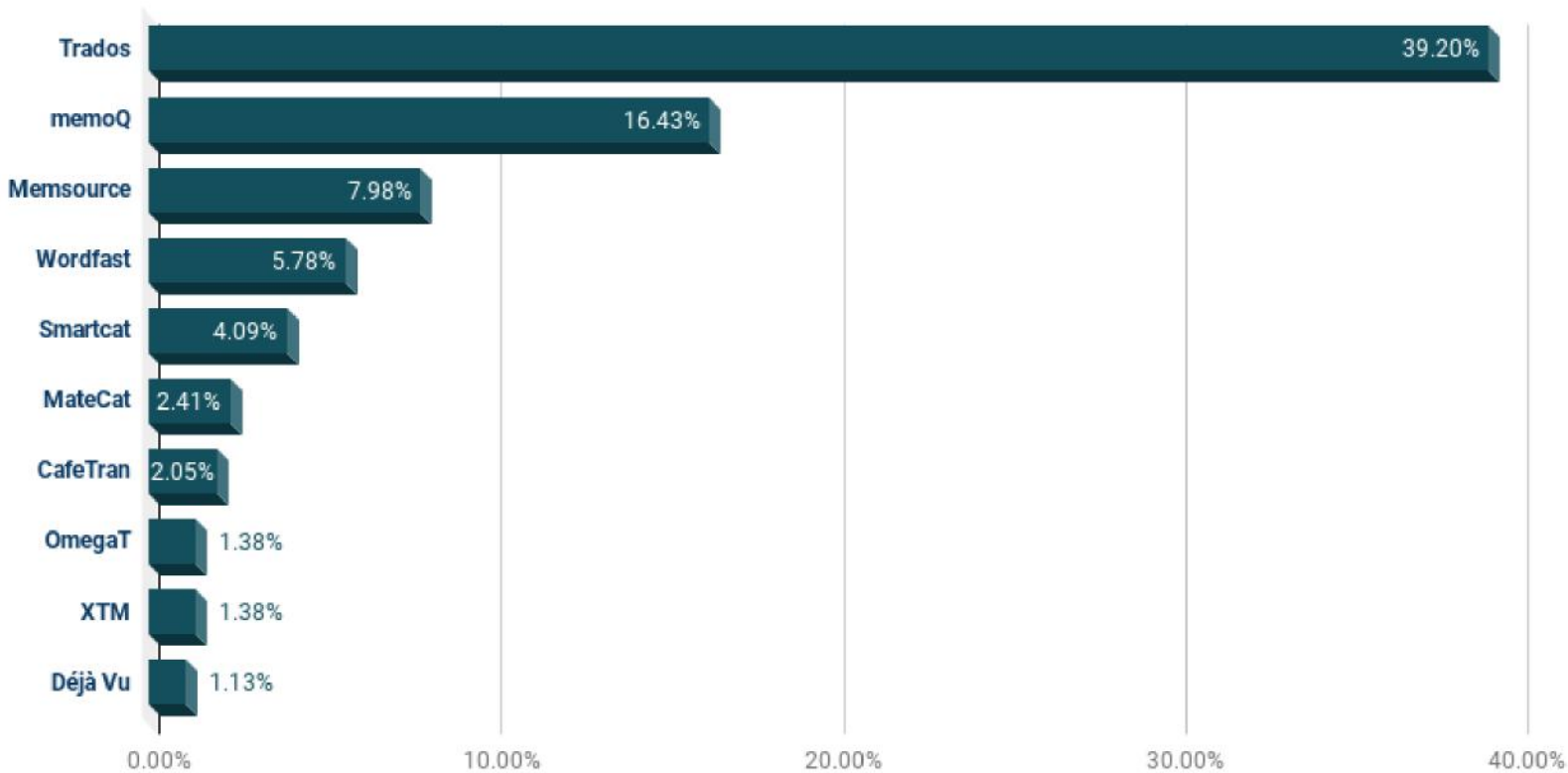
Most used CAT tools
as reported by translators



Top tools in 2023

Translators were also asked to declare which tool they use *the most*, if they are using more than one. The top three remain the same here, though, with Trados, memoQ, and Memsource coming in first, second, and third respectively (Trados, Wordfast, and memoQ were the top three in the previous report).

"The CAT tool I use the most is..." top 10
(among translators using more than one CAT tool)

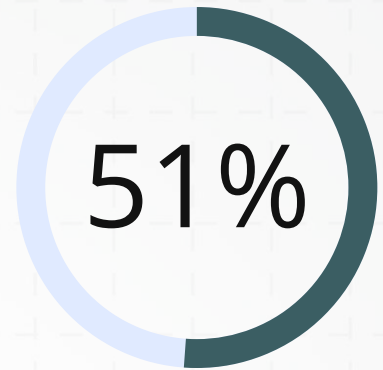


One CAT to rule them all?

From the standpoint of the user, it would be nice to have one CAT tool which is supremely easy to use, supremely compatible with all file types, translators' needs, and client needs/expectations, and which the translator could feel free to use for all the work where they are using a CAT tool.

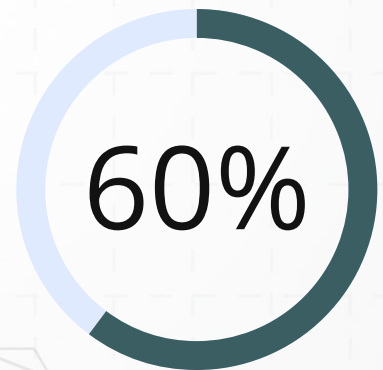
This does not seem to have happened yet, and we may be further from it happening than 10 years ago. Prior to 2013, it was already common for translators to use more than one CAT tool, for a variety of reasons-- in response to client preference or requirements, for example. The 76% of translators who were using more than one CAT tool in 2013 has grown to just over 92% in 2023.

Sometimes this means the translator is investing more money in CAT tools in order to be able to cover the jobs they want to, though not always-- in some cases, for example, the client provides access to the tool as part of the deal. It *does* mean that the translator is investing more time in becoming familiar and then proficient in more than one CAT tool, though, and this affects the bottom line when it comes to overall productivity.



Never tried it

Just over half of the 7% of translators not using a CAT tool have never tried to use one.



Steady, as she goes

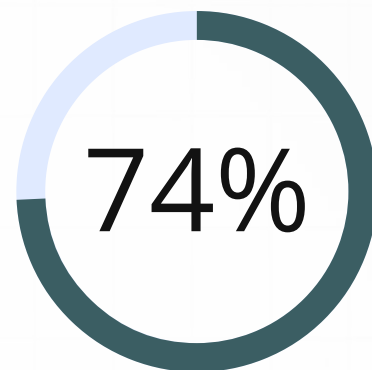
60% of translators state that the usefulness of their CAT tool does not decrease if they are translating outside their area of expertise.

Tell a friend...

If you are looking for a new CAT tool, having a wider array of options to choose from can be great, but it can also make the decision process more confusing, too. If you are searching for your first CAT tool, feedback from fellow translators on what they use and why is the first thing you might seek out (and is probably why you are reading this, if you are in that situation). But how did those translators giving you recommendations choose their primary CAT tool?

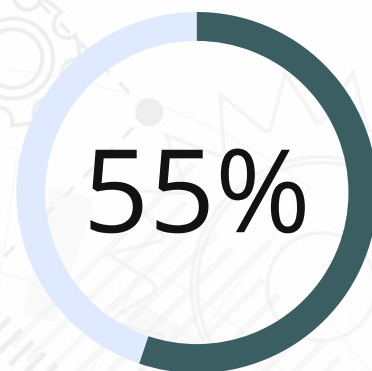
A decent percentage arrived at their primary tool simply because that tool reached them first. In places where university courses in translation are available, at least *some* CAT tool training has become closer to the norm, and if this is not included in the curriculum, it is often driven by individual professors. CAT tool training is more likely to form part of general courses outside the traditional university setting as well. Those who get started working at in-house positions or in mentorships will often come away with their primary CAT tool set.

Colleague recommendations, market research, and client expectations are other main factors, in ascending order, though these percentages are down somewhat from 2013. Client expectation or requirement is by far the largest factor. In some cases, a client may require the use of (and even provide access to) a specific tool. In others, what the client needs is file compatibility, but the requirement gets presented or expressed as “Must use CAT tool X” when CAT tools Y and Z may be perfectly fine as long as there is file compatibility and consistency.



Comes with the job

74% of translators report having at least one client who provides access to a CAT tool for them to work on jobs with that client.



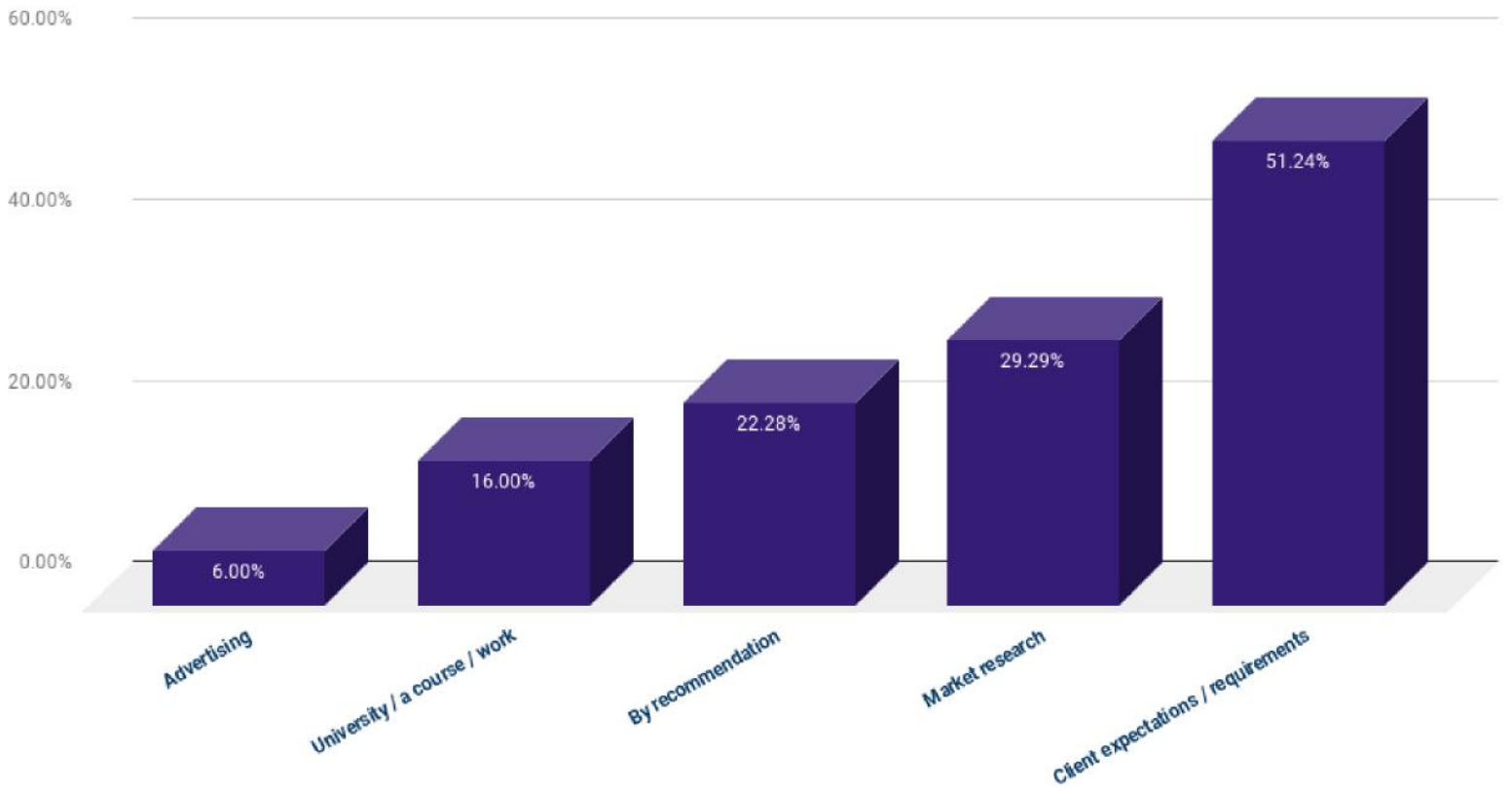
Like it on the desktop

55% of CAT tool users prefer desktop, or locally-installed CAT tools.

Tell a friend...

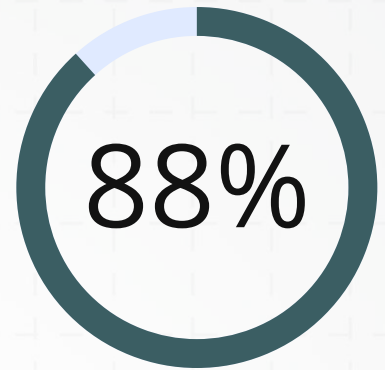
How did you arrive at your (primary) CAT tool?

(respondents could select all that applied)



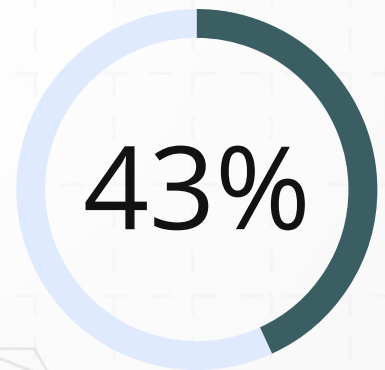
Lots of love...

Chances are, your primary CAT tool is also going to be your favorite. You've spent time with it, become proficient in its use, and work faster with it than you might if you have to switch gears by switching to a tool you have used less. So the ranking of primary and favorite CAT tools follows the same order, though the percentages are a bit different, indicating that it is not necessarily primary = favorite across the board.



So happy together...

88% of translators who use a CAT tool are happy with what they can do with it. 5% would call CAT tools "a necessary evil", and the rest are neutral on the matter.

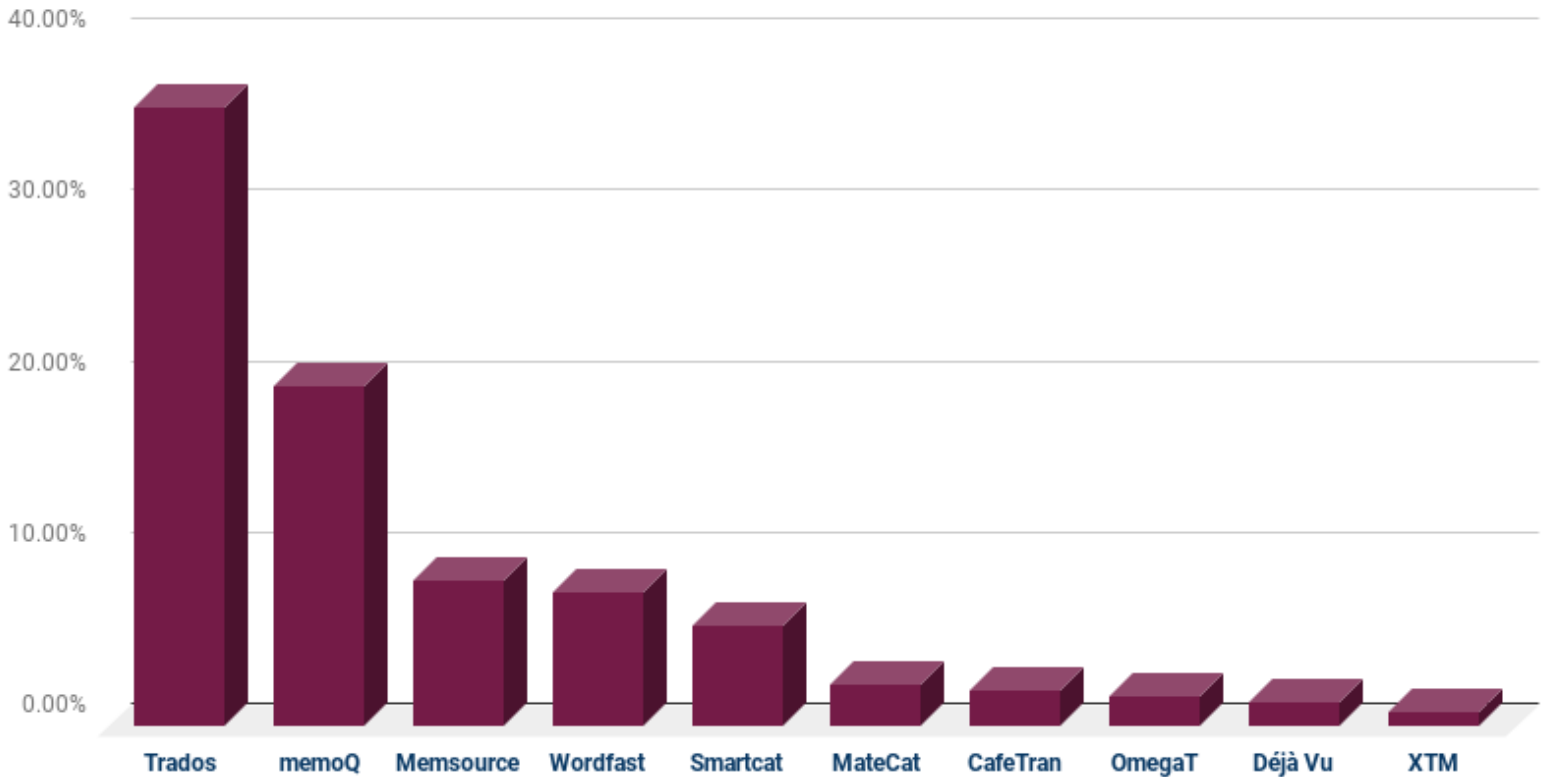


I'm not the one

Of translators who do not use a CAT tool, 43% say they find them to be a good resource, but simply not useful for the type/nature of work they do.

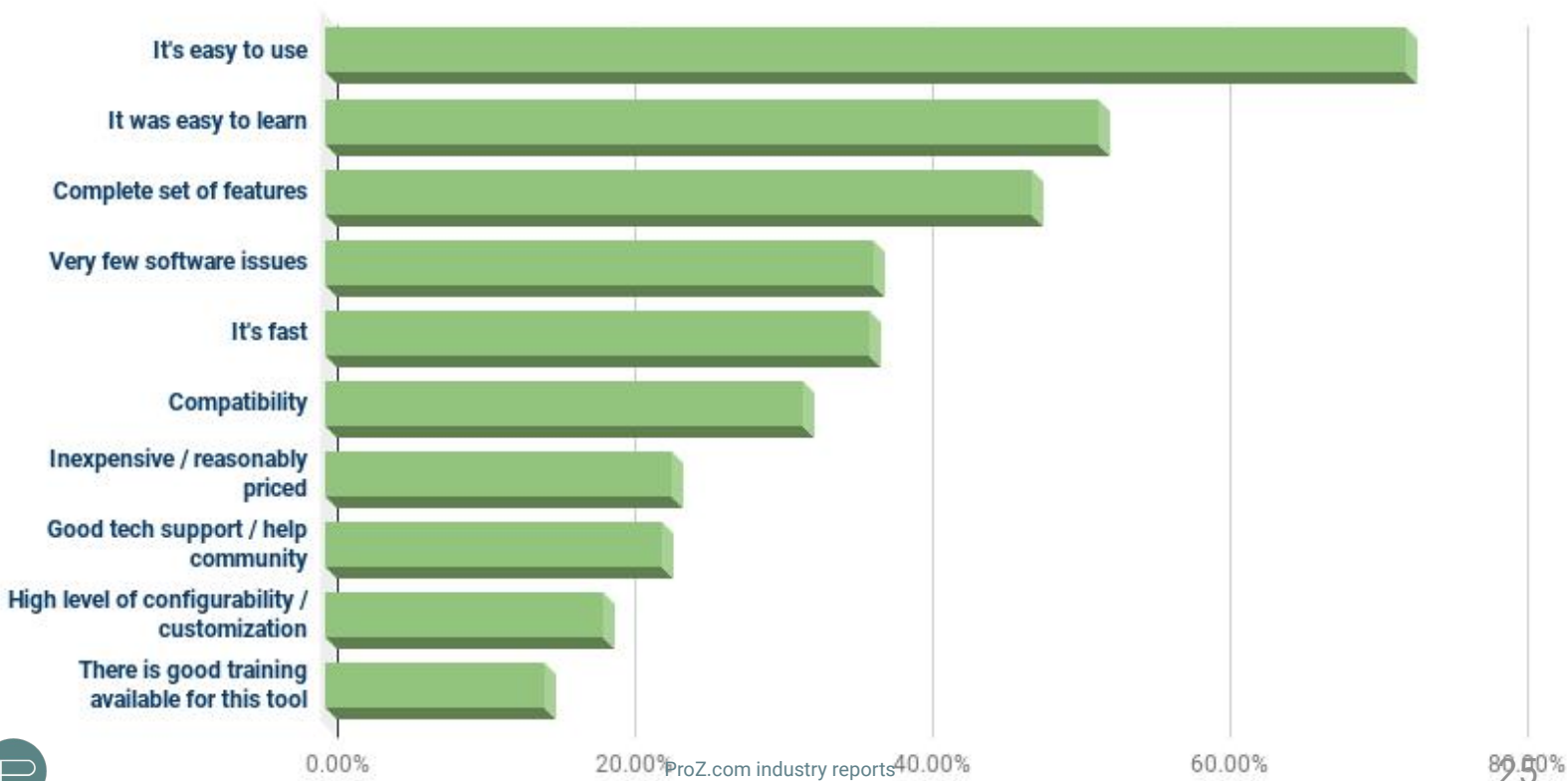
"My favorite CAT tool is..." top 10

(among translators using more than one CAT tool)



What makes your favorite CAT tool your favorite?

(among translators using more than one CAT tool)



Lots of love...

MY CAT TOOL IS BETTER THAN YOURS.



... Lots of hate?

When something is popular or widely-used, it can be expected to receive a greater quantity of negative feedback as well— that's just part of the game. So it should be no surprise that a tool like Trados, which has long dominated the CAT tool landscape, is number one on both the list of favorites as well as least favorites (though there is a markedly lower percentage of translators reporting it as their least favorite). The ranking of least favorite CAT tools is notably different after that, however.



19%

Simplicity, please

19% of CAT tool users struggle with having too many features, settings, and other options within their CAT tool.

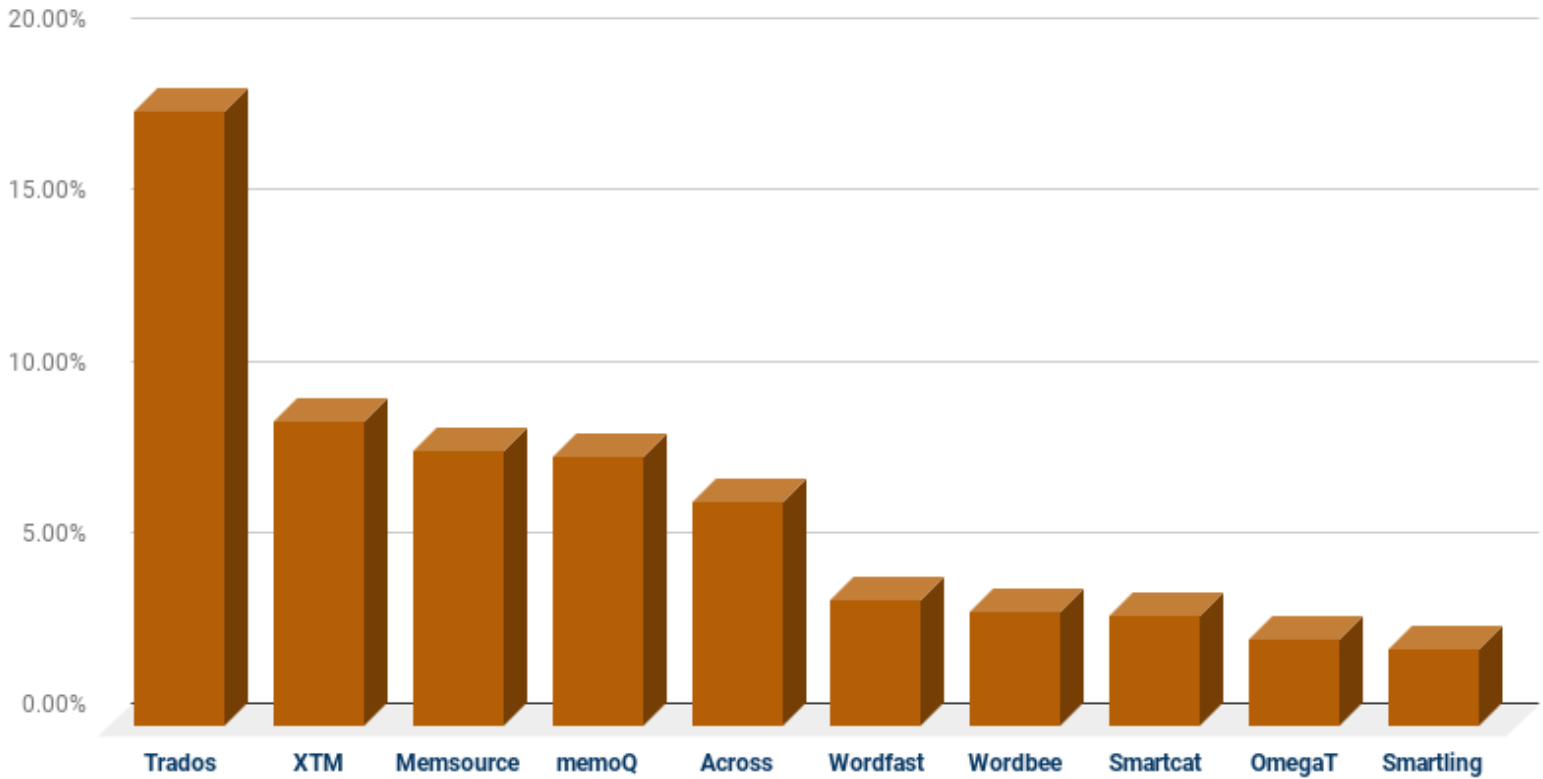


63%

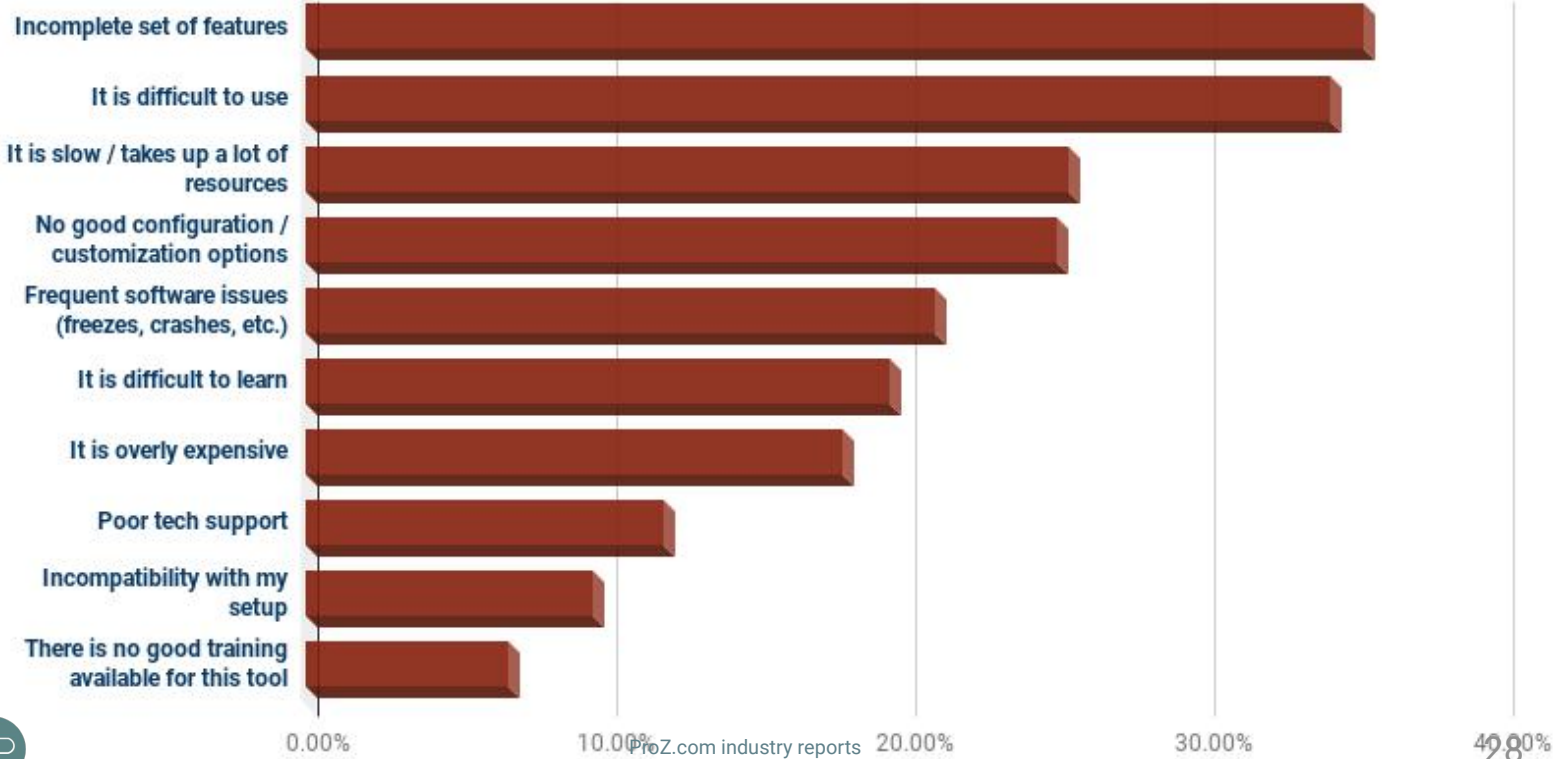
The CAT is too darn high

63% of translators would say that CAT tools are "overpriced" in general.

"My least favorite CAT tool is..." top ten (among translators using more than one CAT tool)

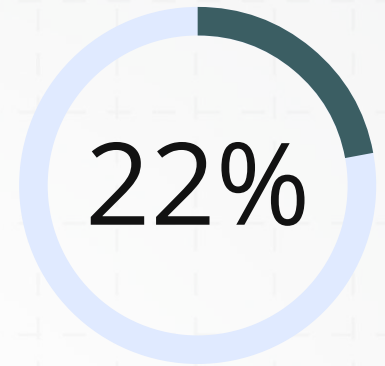


What is wrong with your least favorite CAT tool? (among translators using more than one CAT tool)



Gathering dust

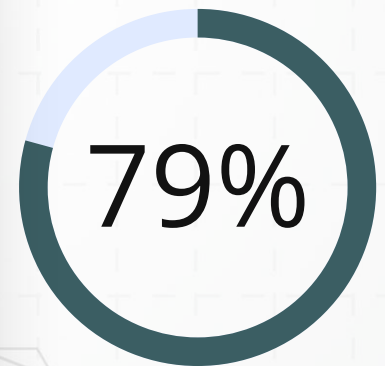
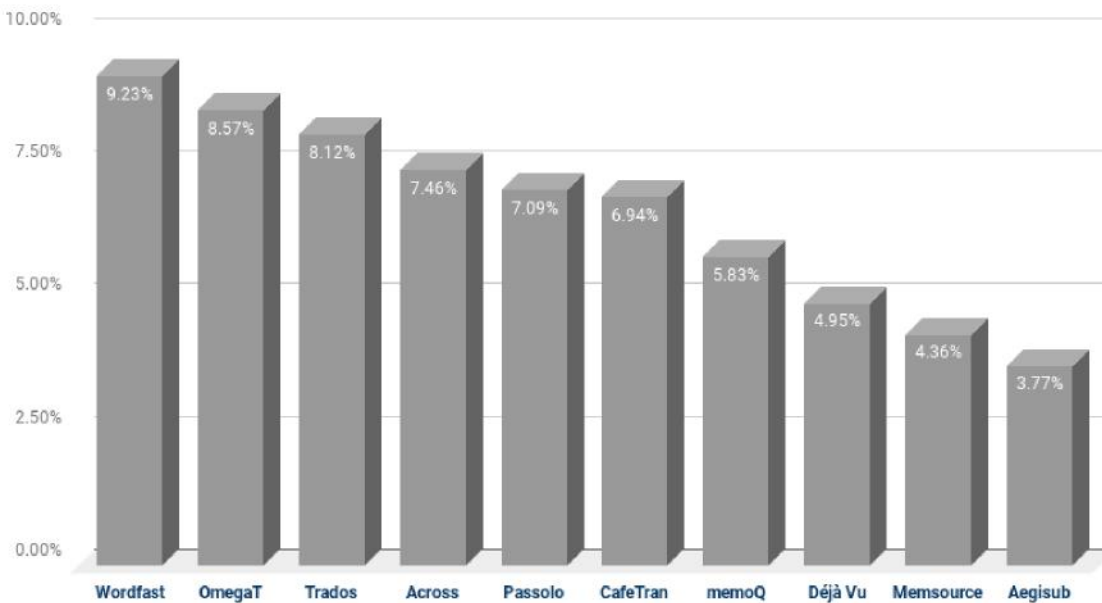
Translators were also asked to report any CAT tools which they own but do not use. Language support, compatibility, poor frequency and quality of updates, difficulty in learning or using, and lack of client expectation/requirement for their use were all common reasons given for why these tools were gathering dust in these translators' arsenals.



That new CAT smell

22% of translators report having purchased a CAT tool in the last 12 months.

Do you have a CAT tool that you do not use? (top ten)



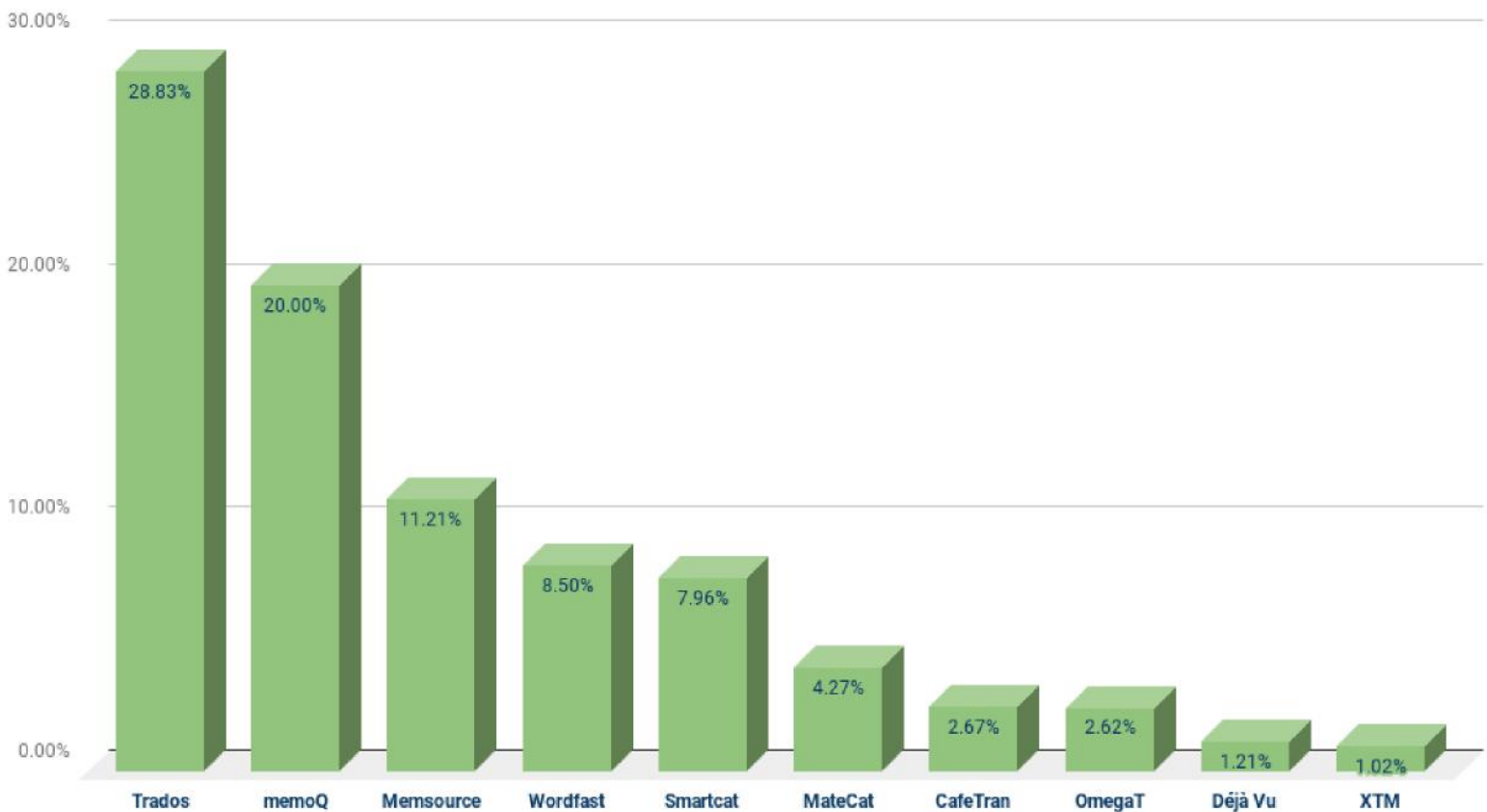
Size matters. But also...

At least 79% of CAT tool users say that there is some importance to the size and/or organization of the TM you are using with your CAT tool.

Translator recommendations

Just to make sure the reader of this report would not be steered wrong about which CAT tools come most recommended, translators were asked which tool they would recommend to someone who is looking for their first CAT tool. The top ten here are the same as the top ten favorite CAT tools, as you may have guessed.

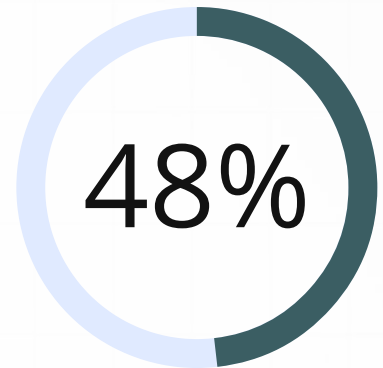
Which CAT tool would you recommend to someone considering their first CAT tool? (top 10)



Accessibility

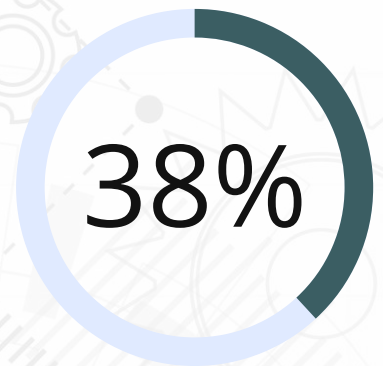
One of the hurdles many CAT tools have yet to cross is that of accessibility. For example, [according to this article](#) by Iman Refaat, many of the most frequently-used or popular CAT tools have limited or no compatibility with screen readers. This represents a problem not only with regards to a translator's productivity and job opportunities, but an issue for the individual as a buyer/consumer. A visually-impaired consumer, when paying for a CAT tool, may be purchasing the product at the same price as everyone else but is paying for only partial usability, greatly reducing their potential return on investment. And if we focus just on visual impairment, it may be helpful to know that close to 13% of translators consider themselves seriously visually impaired.

Squeaky wheels sometimes get the grease, however, and thanks to Iman's advocacy on behalf of the visually-impaired translator, she was able to report back in late 2022 that she had been contacted by the folks at both Memsources and memoQ, who were interested in incorporating feedback which would help improve the accessibility of their software ([see this post](#) in the ProZ.com Facebook group).



Machine in my machine

48% of CAT tool users do not use the machine translation options included in their CAT tool(s).



Be ready.

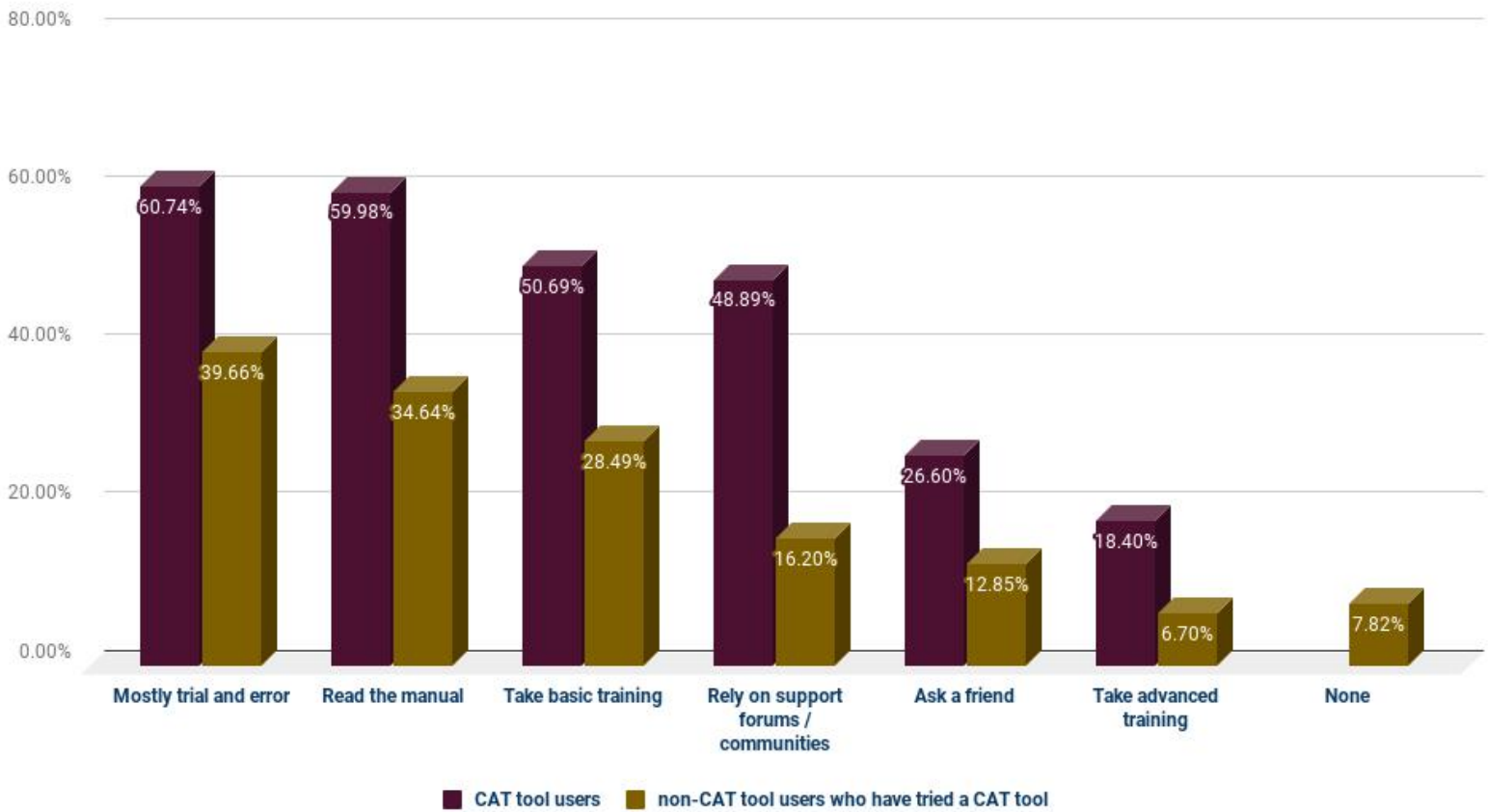
38% of translators are already experimenting with AI which is not strictly machine translation, both in and out of their CAT tools, to see if and where it can make them more efficient.

Investments in learning your CAT tool

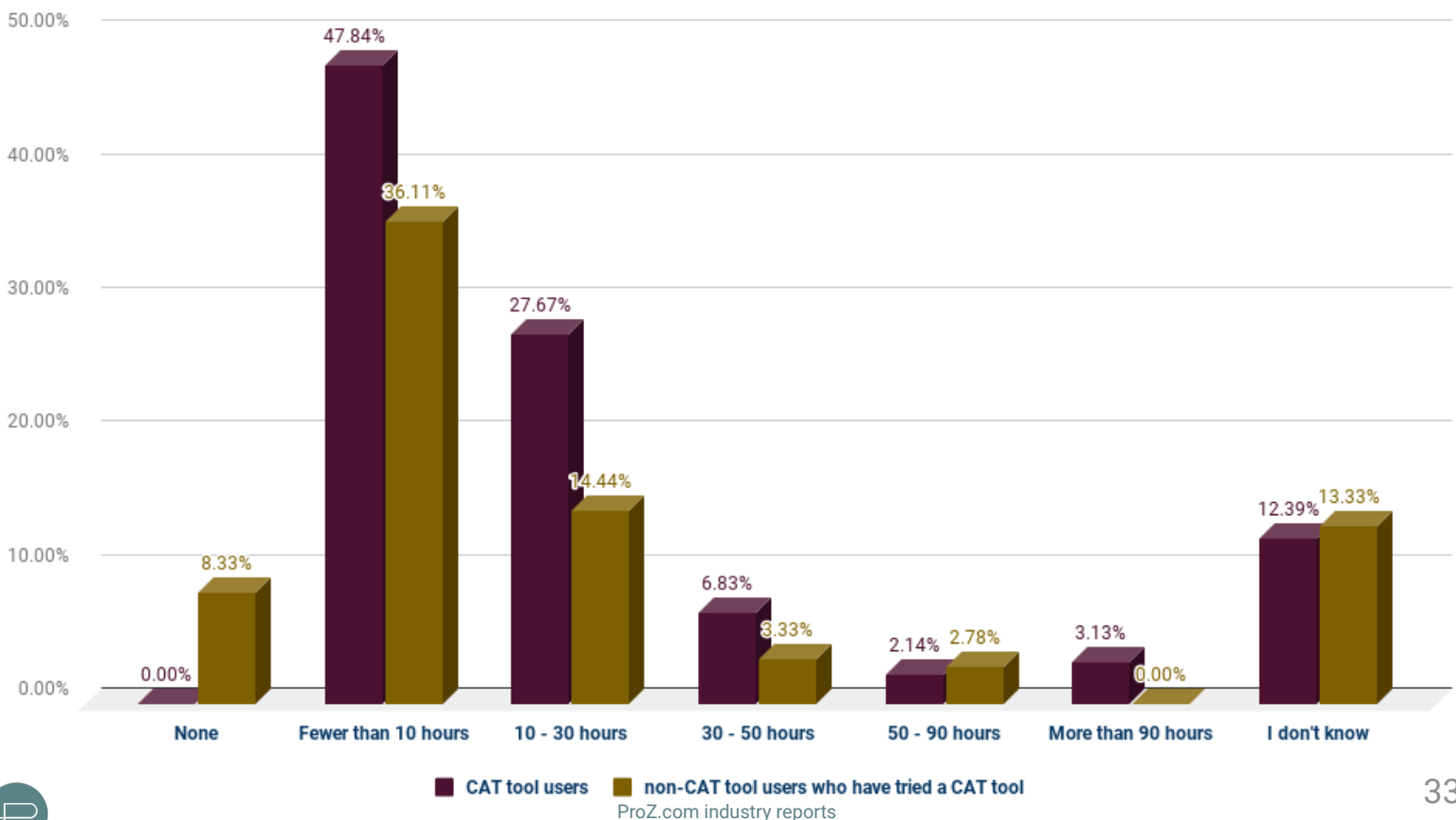
The only people who made absolutely no investment in learning a CAT tool were a small percentage of the small group of translators who do not use a CAT tool but who have tried one in the past.

“Investment” here refers mostly to time, though some do invest in paid courses to learn one or more CAT tools. Everyone else put some time and effort in. And “effort” is relative: the two most common ways of learning a CAT tool are “Mostly trial and error” and “Read the manual”. So, as you can see, nothing fancy. Basic CAT tool training for the tool you are using is usually available, not time-consuming, and most often free nowadays. And for some CAT tools, active support forums and communities have grown out of the needs of their user base and the enthusiasm of some of the more proficient users for helping others to get what they are getting out of the software. If you take the perspective of the CAT tool as something to help you be more efficient and consistent in your work, it only makes sense to put in a certain amount of time and effort to not just learn how to use it, but to become fully proficient in it (thereby further increasing your efficiency, and your return on investment in the tool). And we’re not talking 10,000 hours here-- spend that on the actual translation. The majority of translators have spent fewer than 30 hours learning or getting trained in their CAT tool, and nearly 48% have spent fewer than 10 hours.

How did you learn to use your CAT tool?



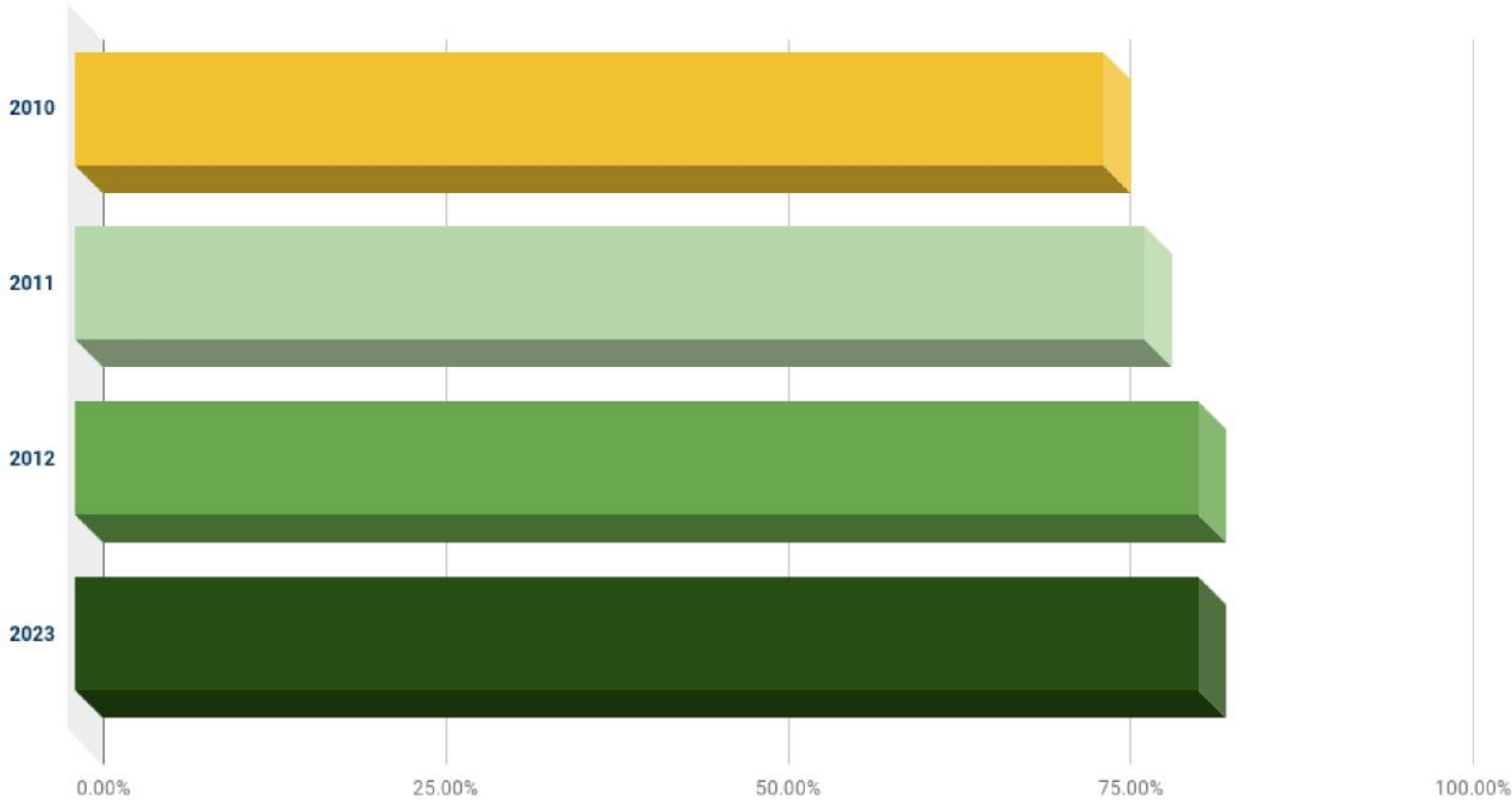
How long did you spend training or getting trained to use your CAT tool?



Productivity over time

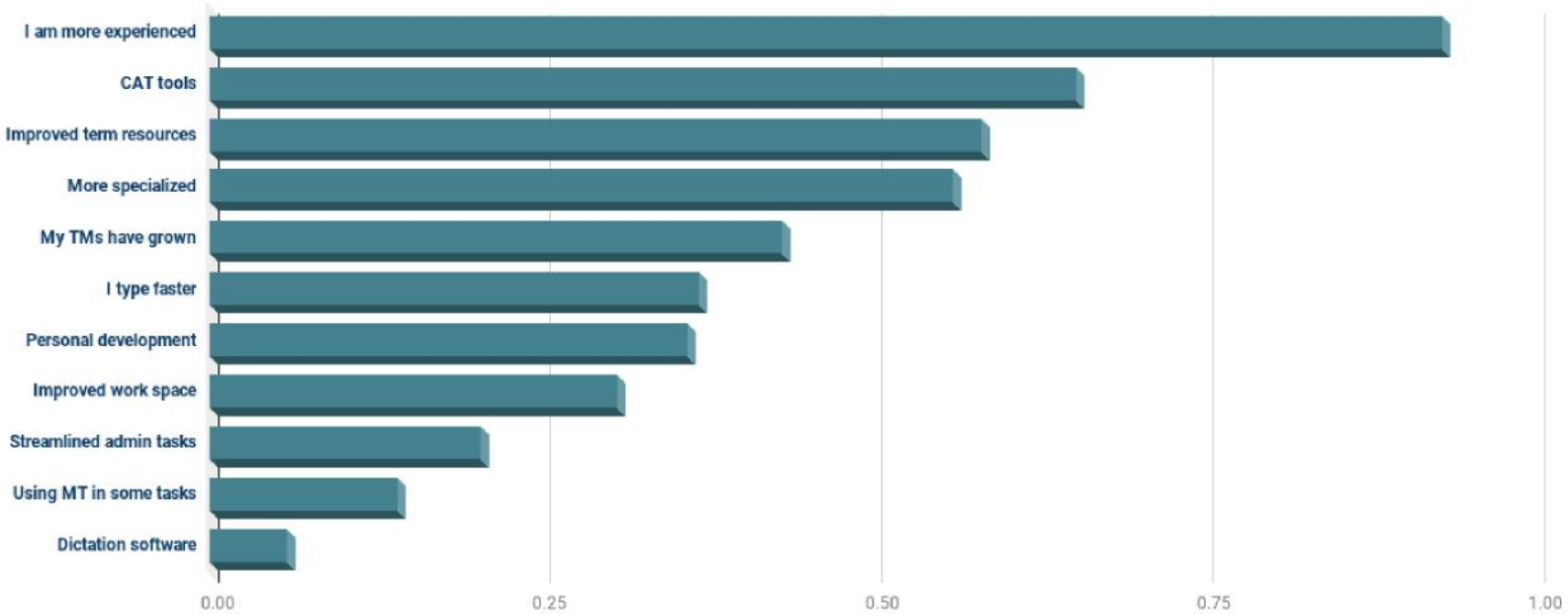
How much does a CAT tool increase your productivity? Translators report an average increase in efficiency of 72%. In reporting this, translators were asked to base their productivity increase on an average project for them, in their main area of expertise (i.e. you wouldn't expect the same level of productivity with some kinds of jobs, and especially not for jobs where you are less experienced in the subject matter). However, it is worth noting that 60% of translators say that the usefulness of their CAT tool does not decrease if they are translating outside their area of expertise (19% could not say for sure).

Percentage of translators paying attention to productivity

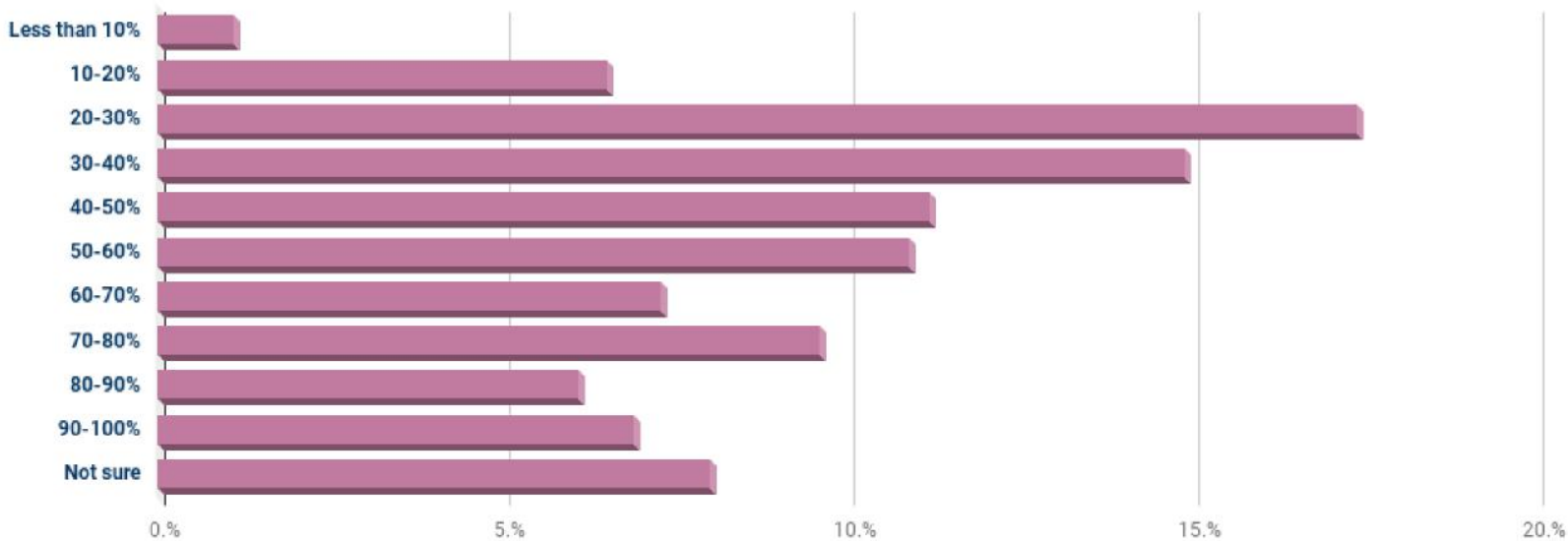


Productivity over time

What is making you more efficient?



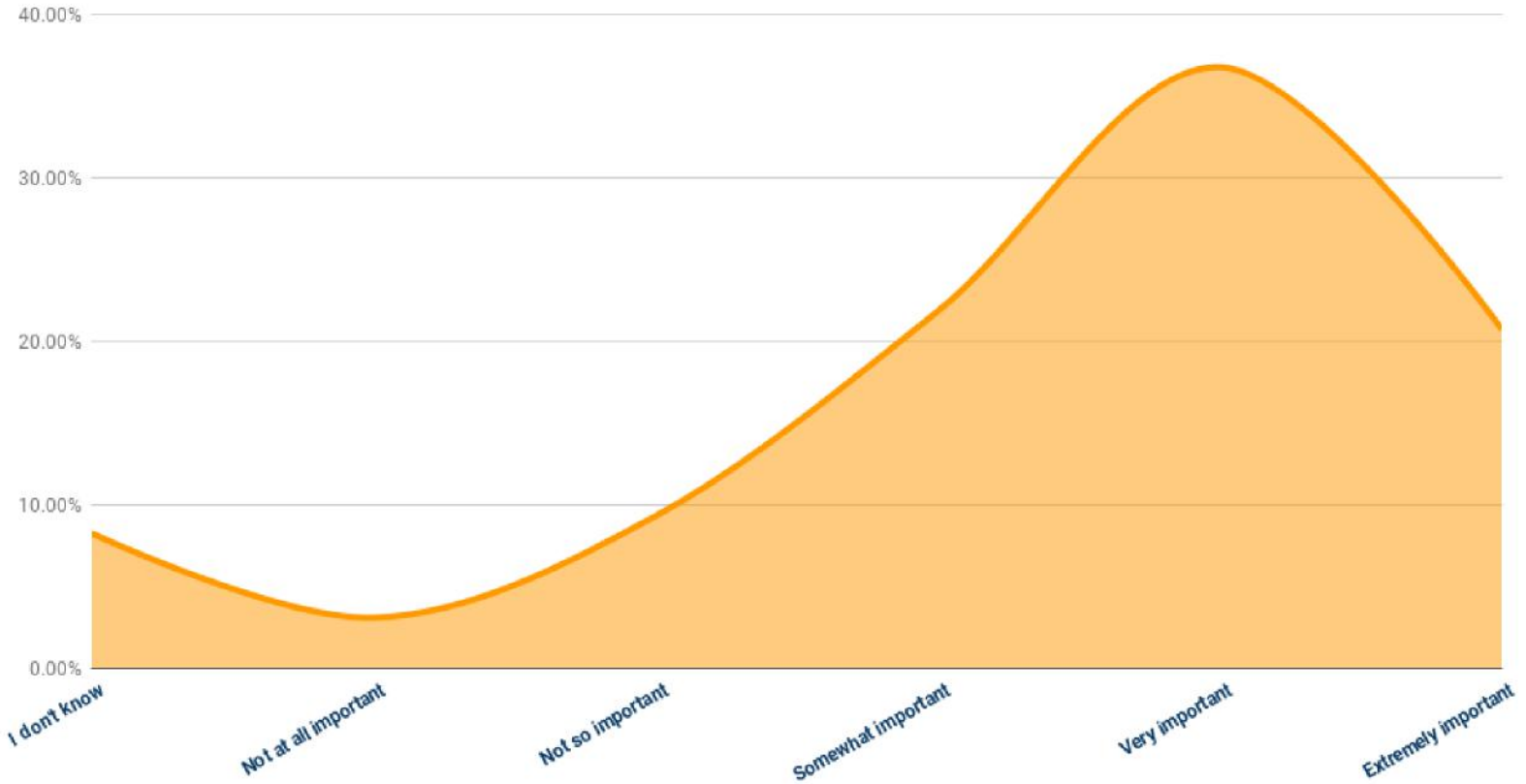
How much more efficiently do you translate using a CAT tool?



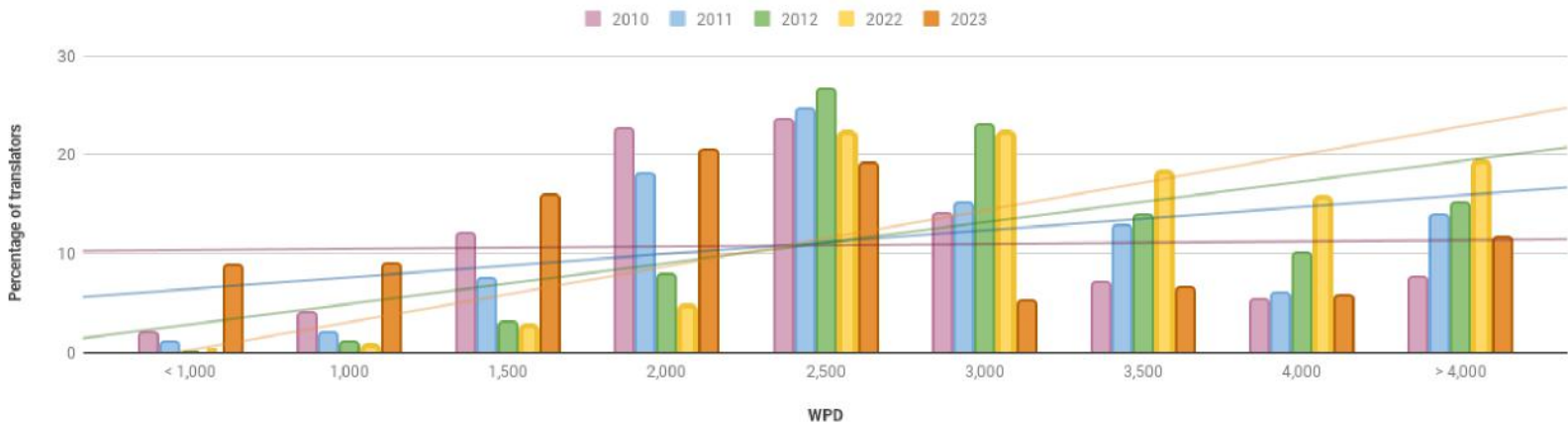
Increase in efficiency based on average project in the translator's area of expertise

Productivity over time

How important is the size or organization of your translation memories (TMs) in the CAT tool you use, in general?



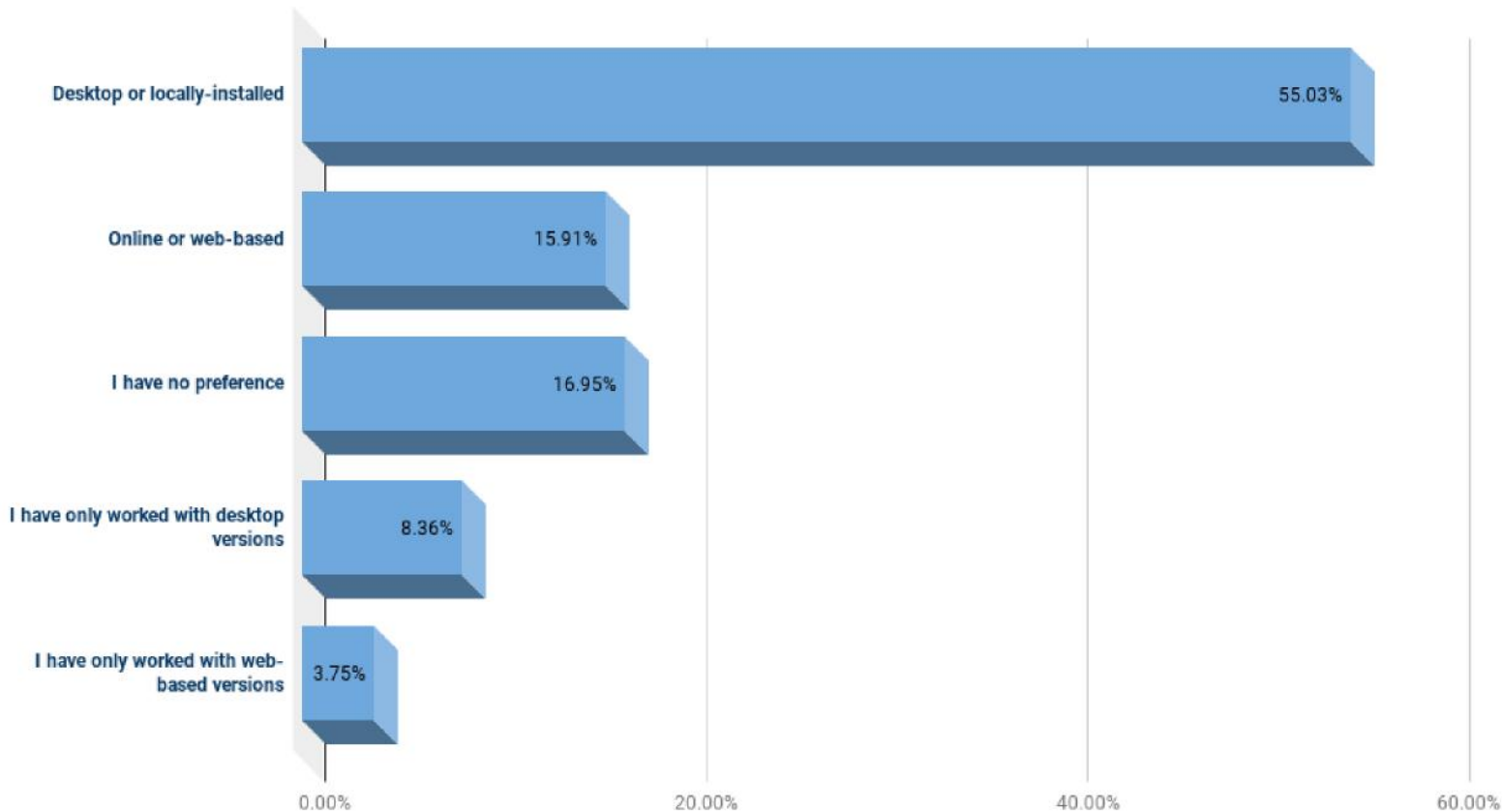
Comparison of productivity, words per day, by year



General preferences

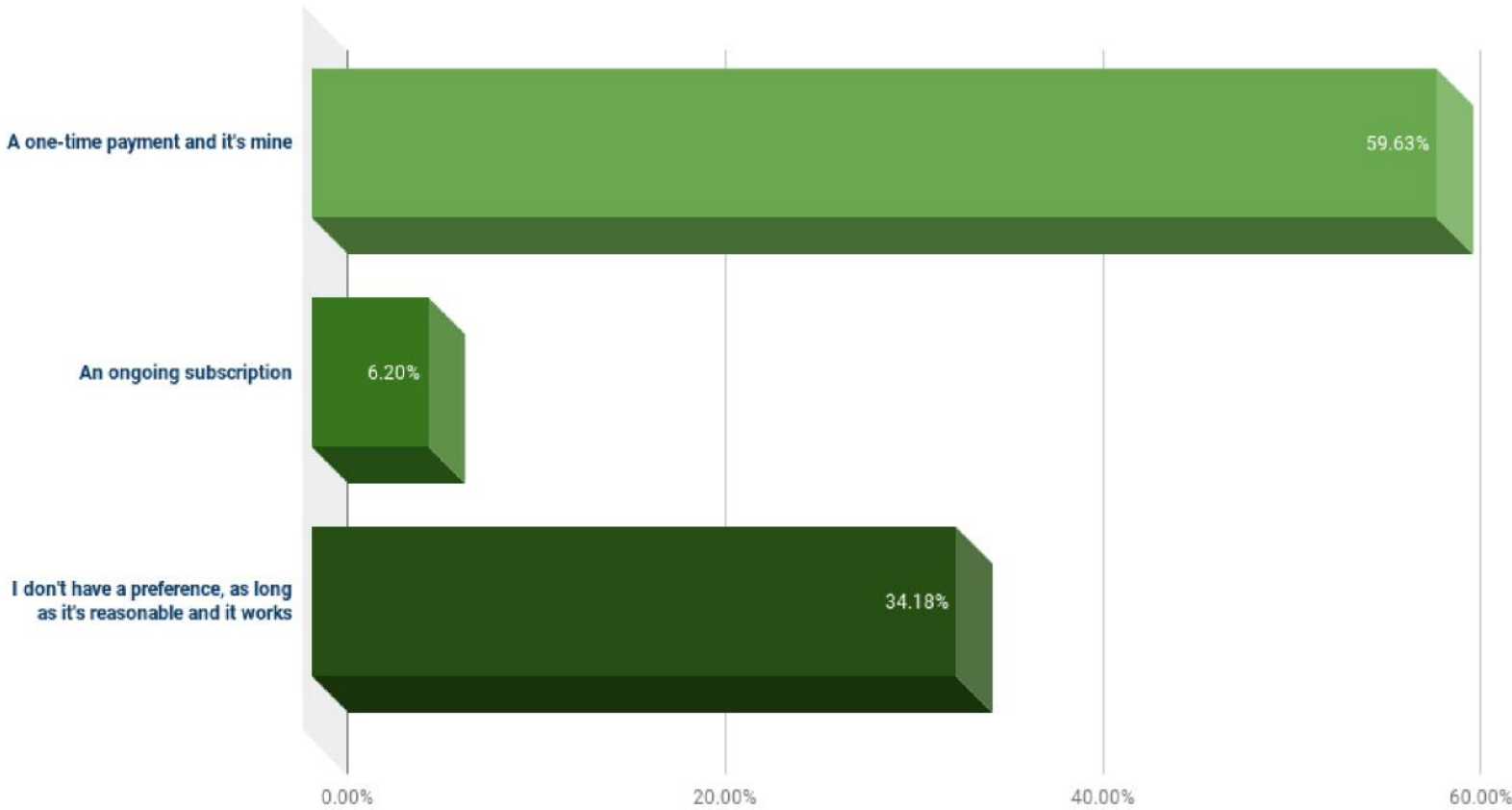
A couple of newer trends in the delivery methods of a CAT tool struggle to gain ground among CAT tool users. Software in general is increasingly web-based, and paid software is also increasingly via a subscription model. Most translators still prefer a desktop or locally-installed version of a CAT tool, and most also prefer the payment model where you pay once and that version is yours, potentially with some upgrades included in the package.

Desktop or cloud-based: which do you prefer to work with?



General preferences

Paid CAT tools: which payment model do you prefer?

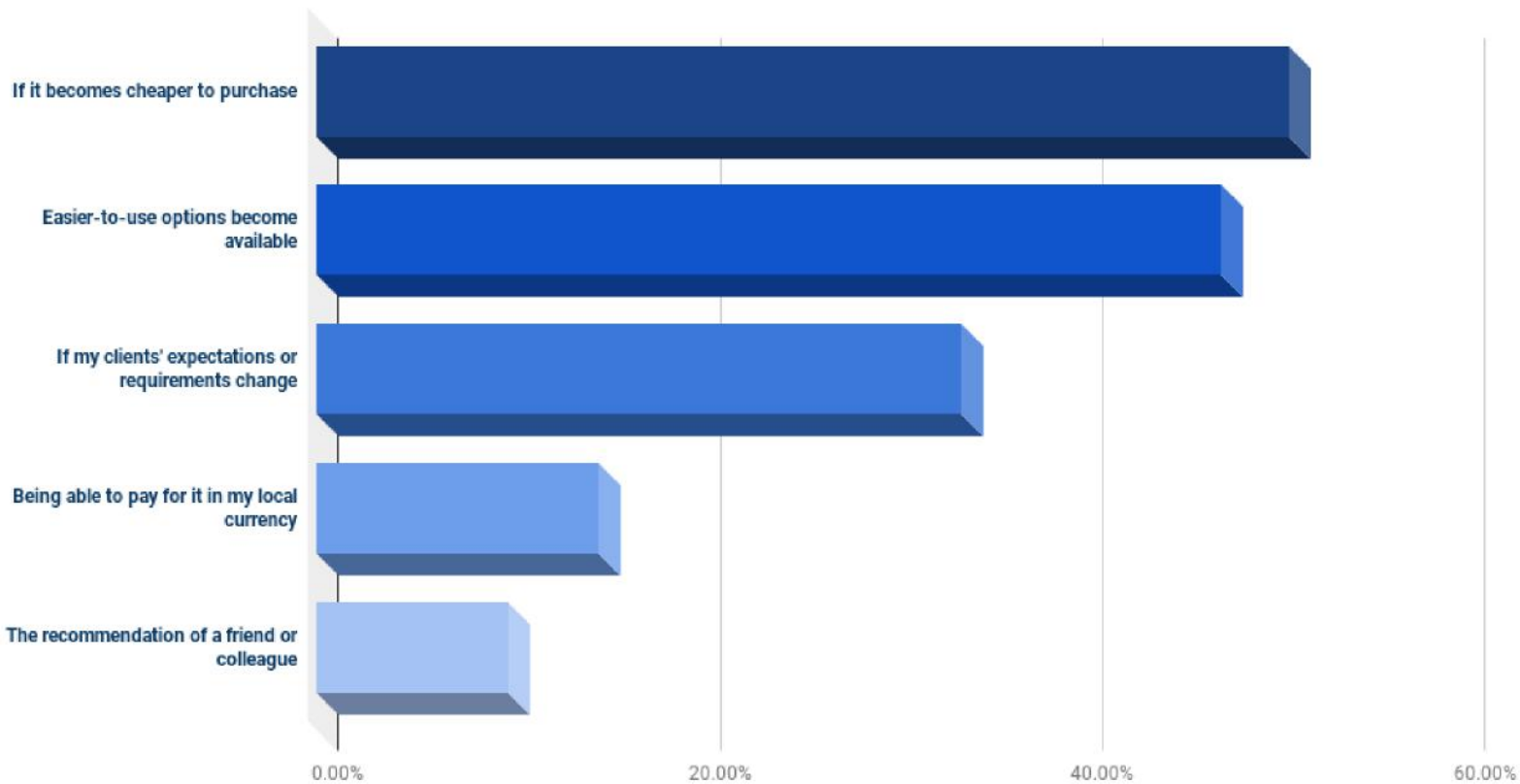


Non-CAT tool users: What would change your mind?

When translators who do not use a CAT tool were asked what might cause them to reconsider using a CAT tool, price was the top factor. For some of the better-known and more popular tools, pricing indeed is not trivial for the freelancer just getting started out. Note, however, that some CAT tools nowadays are free to use, or have free-to-use versions, so if price is limiting your decision, you may do well by starting there.

What would make you reconsider using a CAT tool?

asked of translators who do not use a CAT tool but who have tried one (3.43%)



Translators not using a CAT tool

3.8

average self-rating for computer usage
skills/literacy



Translators using a CAT tool

4.1

average self-rating for computer usage
skills/literacy



The next wave, already upon us: Artificial intelligence

In 2023, the scramble is on to incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) wherever possible. Machine translation (MT) options have already made their way into many or most CAT tools, as advances in MT and translator adoption of its benefits increase. But with the sudden popularization of Large Language Models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, and others, AI may have already come to a CAT tool you own too, and if it has not, it most likely will soon.

Some people have asked, “What’s the fuss?” or “What’s the rush?”



...And on that farm he had a CAT, A-I A-I...

Oh. A *CAT*. With AI.

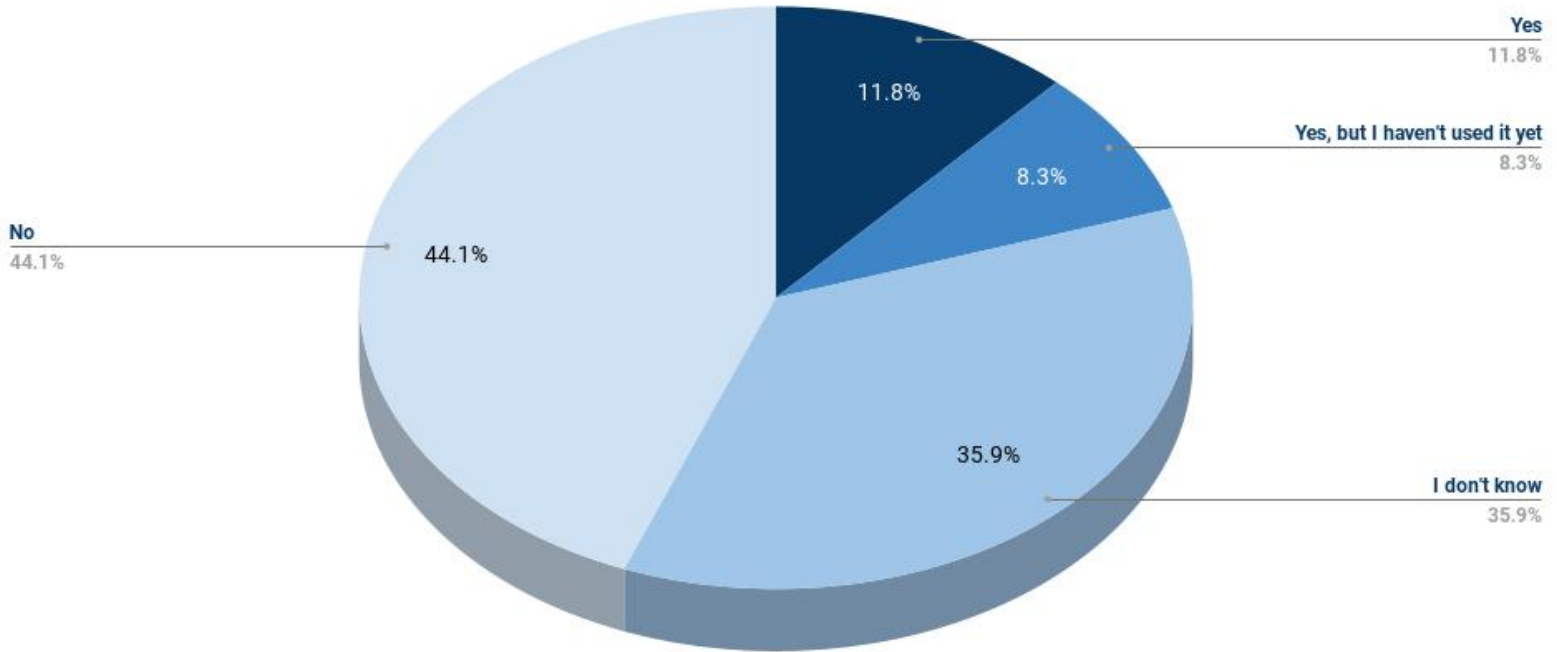
I got the
ChatGPT,
Mac.

Gee-whiz, Jerome!

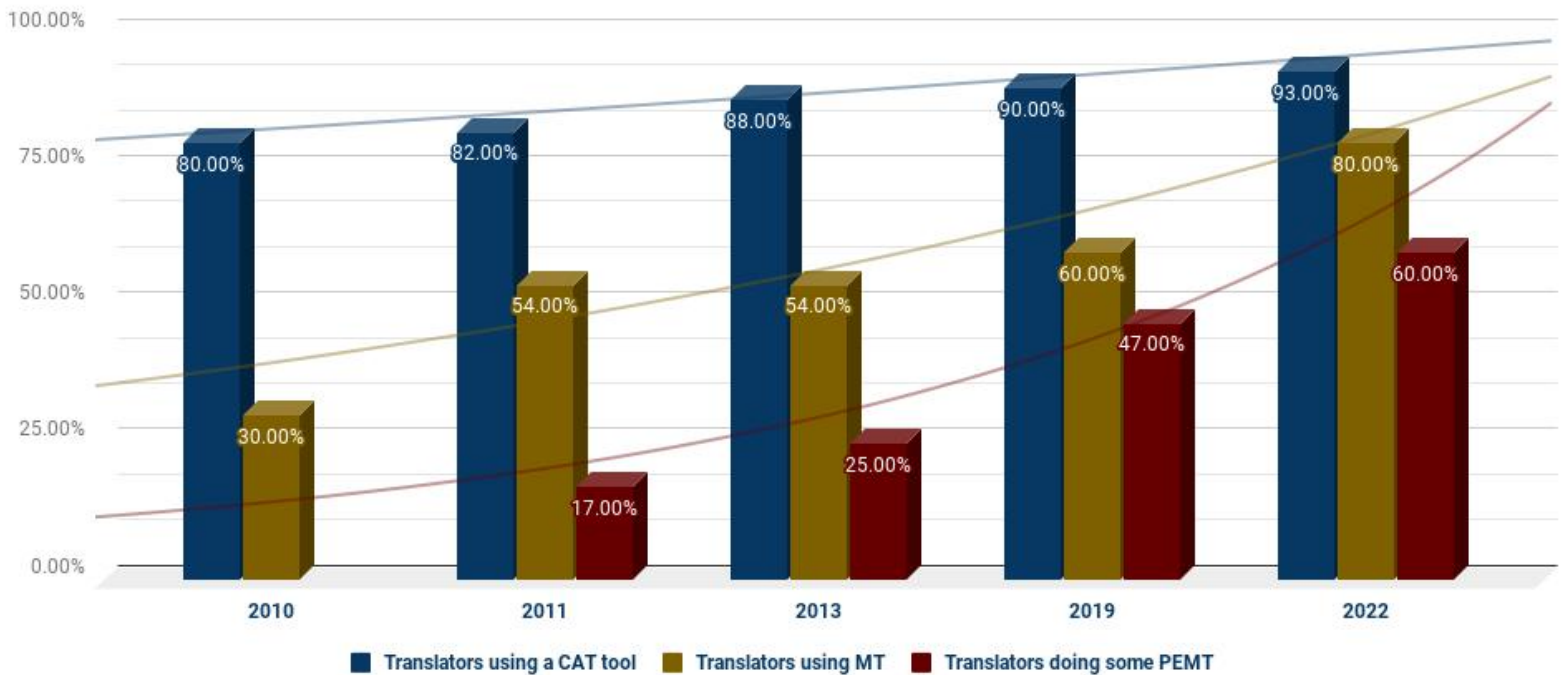
Well, come eat
your TMs

The next wave, already upon us: Artificial intelligence

Has your CAT tool incorporated AI?

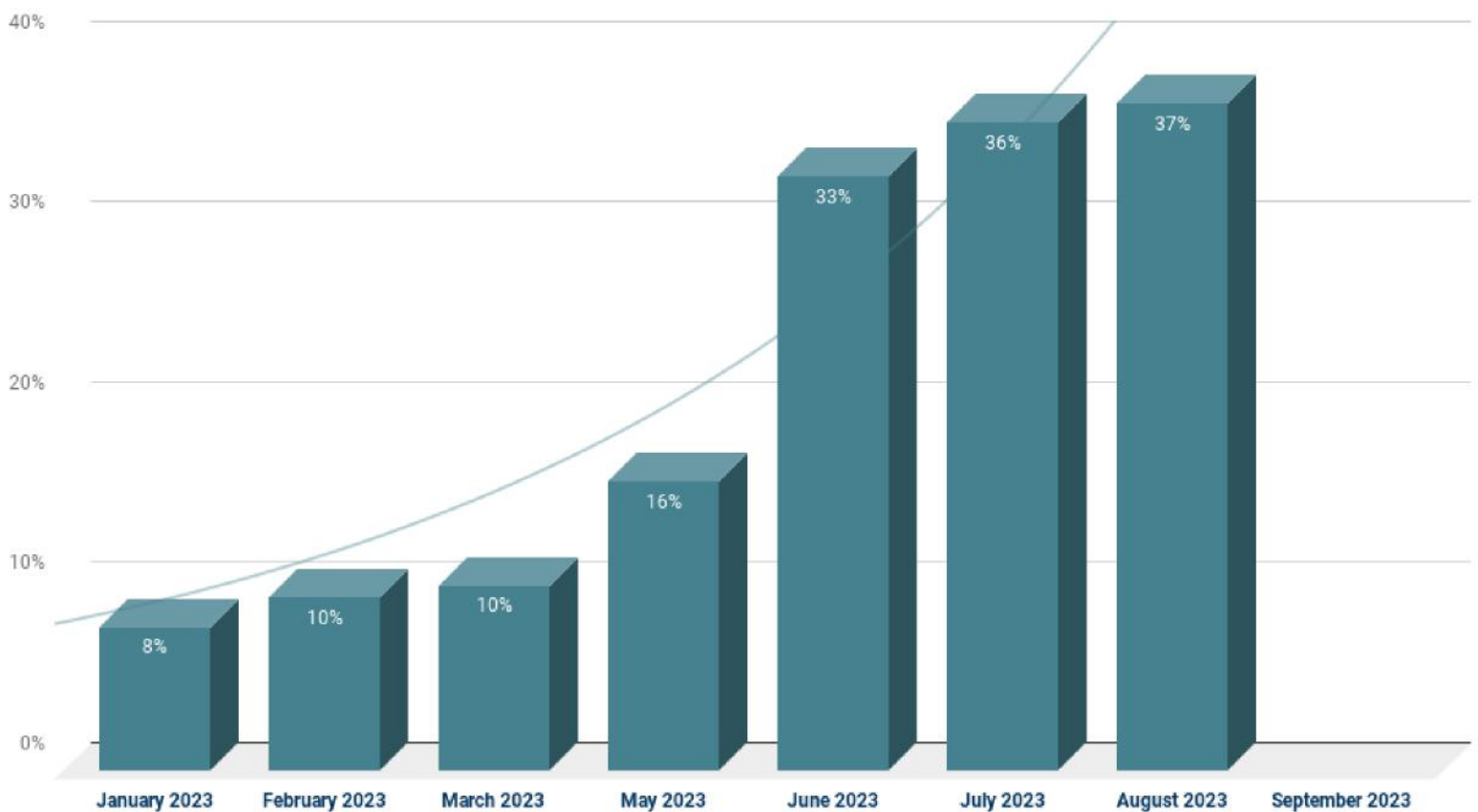


CAT tool, MT and AI adoption over time



The next wave, already upon us: Artificial intelligence

Translators using AI for some tasks (not machine translation)



The next wave, already upon us: Artificial intelligence

Well, let's put aside the fact that it's become fashionable to talk about AI and try to include it wherever possible. Let's look just at the work of the translator. Already, translators have found ways to leverage LLMs for some tasks, and are finding ways to become more efficient, not just while translating or transcreating, but also at tasks around translation (research, communication, content creation, negotiation, glossary generation, etc.). Machine translation use among translators developed in a very similar way, as did CAT tool adoption before that. But what is different here is the speed at which everything is happening, and the speed at which the technology is improving. Where CAT tool and then MT use or adoption might have been better measured on a yearly basis, LLM use/adoption is moving notably on a monthly basis (at least for now!). With MT, it has usually been the translator who is more in the know about the ins and outs of the technology, and what it is good for, and they have already built up that experience and knowledge by the time their clients start asking about it. You probably want to be in a similar position when it comes to LLMs and AI applied to translation. And if there are concrete ways in which using this technology can make you more efficient, and leave you more time to do the stuff that really requires a human brain and expertise, which is the part of translation that many people enjoy most, why not?

This report would have been finished a couple of months earlier if I had let ChatGPT write a first draft, I'm sure. But some old habits die hard.



Jared Tabor
Member services
ProZ.com

Jared has been with ProZ.com since 2007, where, among other things, he works on ProZ.com's industry reports, which are **about** and **for** freelance language professionals.

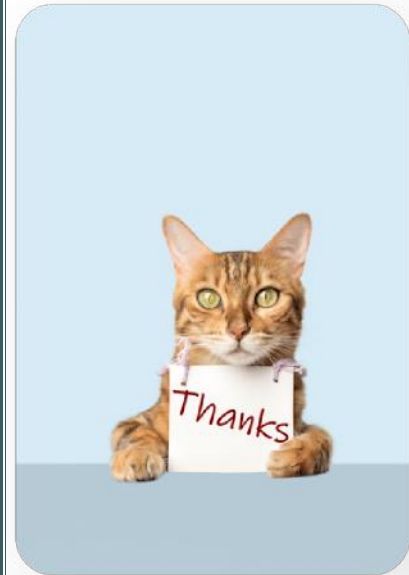



SOFTWARE
Comparison Tool

*You can view ratings, translator reviews, compare features and download free trials for most CAT tools and other translator software using ProZ.com's **translation software comparison tool**.*

Thank you...

Thanks goes out to the thousands of language professionals who participated in the surveys on CAT tools and who contributed in one way or another to the information in this report. And a special thank you, as always, to all ProZ.com paying members, since it is your membership investment which makes these reports possible.



Selected further reading

Previous industry reports

- *CAT tools (part one), 2013:*
<https://bit.ly/CATtools01>
- *Industry overview: interpreters in 2023:*
<https://bit.ly/terp2023>
- *ProZ.com industry report: freelance language professionals in 2022:*
<https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2022>
- *Human response to a changing industry: How are freelance translators and interpreters adapting to technological innovation? (2019):*
https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2019_human_response
- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2012:*
<https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2012>
- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2011:*
<https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2011>
- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2010:*
<https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2010>

About ProZ.com industry reports



This report was compiled exclusively for ProZ.com members. It was made possible through the participation of ProZ.com members, and thanks to their investment in ProZ.com membership.

Reports on industry trends that affect freelance translators, interpreters, companies providing language services, and others in the industry, are periodically published on ProZ.com.

If you are a ProZ.com paying member, you can access this and other reports here:

<https://www.proz.com/industry-report/>

State of the translation industry reports

ProZ.com "state of the industry" reports take a look at some of the changes that are affecting translators, as told by translators. The reports include discussion of the trends, obstacles and opportunities to freelance work in the translation industry today, and how freelance translators are dealing with these trends.

These reports are free for all [full ProZ.com members](#). Non-members have access to the report abstracts shown on this page.

[Discuss this feature >>](#)

Abstracts

State of the industry: freelance translators in 2012

Introduction

Commenting on the impact of the Internet and other factors leading to accelerated globalization, Thomas Friedman, in *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, wrote, "The world has been flattened ... global collaboration and competition -- between individuals and individuals, companies and individuals, companies and companies, and companies and customers -- have been made cheaper, easier, more friction-free, and more productive for more people from more corners of the earth than at any time in the history of the world."

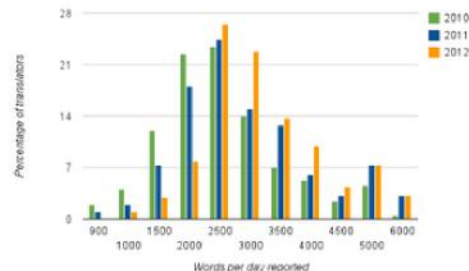
These changes, of course, have also affected translation. As companies have gained increased access to new potential customers around the world, the need for translation has increased. The translation industry is a healthy, growing one.

Other features of this flattened translation world are, for instance, the increased turnaround times translation projects demand. It is easier now too for clients to find the right professional for the job, in less time. With advances in content management, the use of translation memories, improvements in machine translation, more effective online and offline resources and many other factors, human translators are now more efficient. They are more specialized. They are, through this heightened productivity and specialization, able to provide increasingly higher quality.

Outline

1. General data
2. Specialization as a given
3. Project turnaround and translator efficiency
4. "New" technologies
5. Quality
6. Demand and growth
7. Translator income, investments and expectations
8. Diversification
9. Differentiation and marketing
10. Strategies for success

Comparison of productivity, words per day, by year



OK, *now* can I go home, boss? Seriously. I am shutting down my computer. In 3, 2, 1...



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