ProZ.com industry overview

(remote) interpreters in

2023

Contents

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(remote) interpreters in

2023

proz.com/industry-report

Previously, on ProZ.com industry reports...

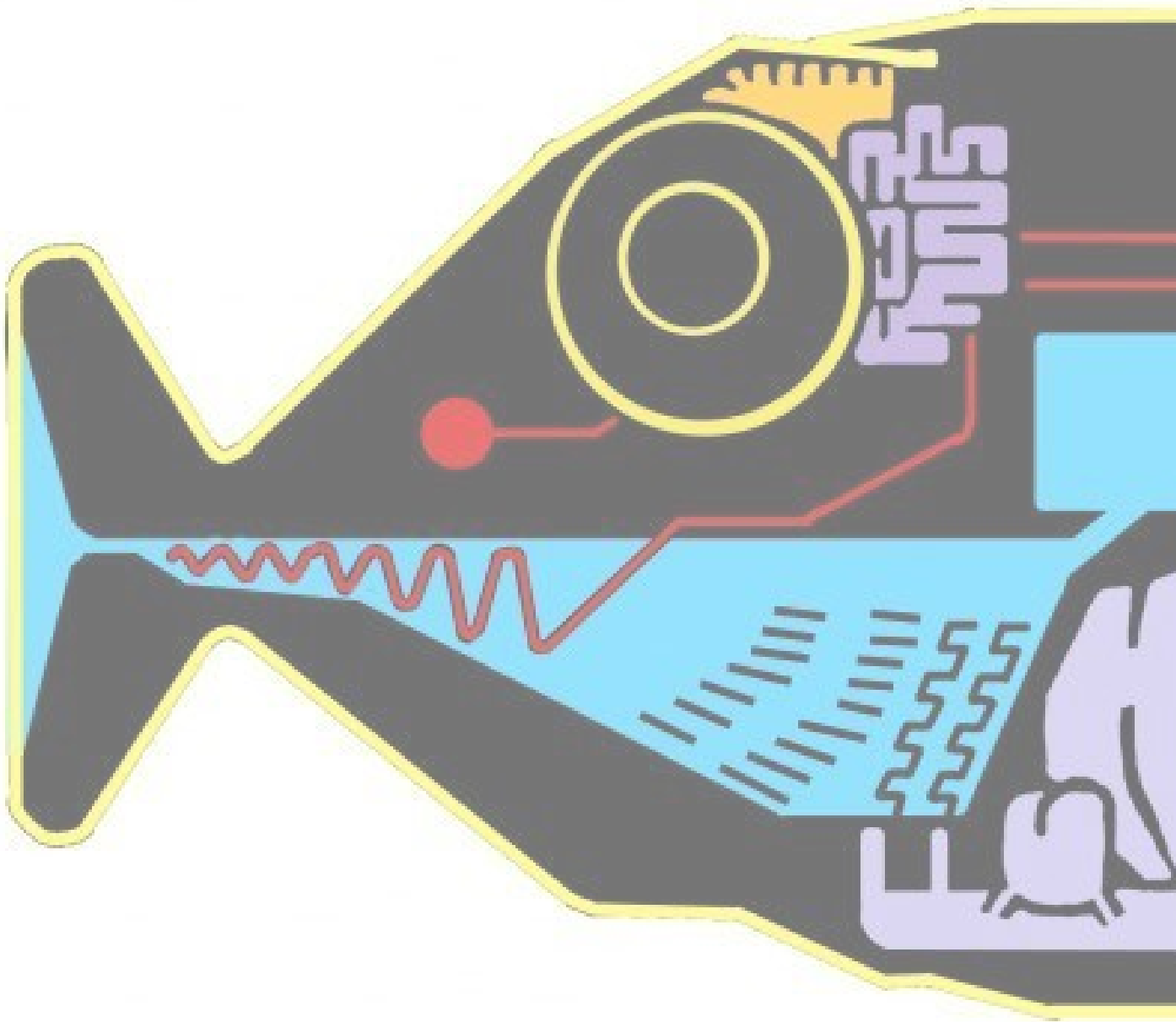If you read last year's <u>ProZ.com industry report for freelancers</u>-- or maybe you heard the <u>audio version</u> narrated by Paul Urwin on the ProZ.com podcast-- you may remember that we looked at two main trends that were affecting interpreters...

The transinterpretification of things

The first one we'll talk about is something that has been building for some time now: an increasing overlap between translators and interpreters. Claudia Brauer coined the term *transinterpreter* to refer to these professionals who do both interpreting and translation. A long-held argument for "sticking to one's lane" has been that translation and interpreting require different skill sets. That's probably true, but they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, so plenty of translators and interpreters are discovering that adding the other service to their offering is both good business and fun. At the moment, between 30 and 40% of language professionals offer both services, to some degree or another.

At least as far as interpreters are concerned, this trend was accelerated by the pandemic, when suddenly traditional forms of interpreting disappeared for a while. Many interpreters found themselves office-bound where they had not been before, and picking up a translation project here and there began to make more sense and allowed them to either steady or increase their income. However, there are still more translators moving into interpreting than there are interpreters moving into translation. One possible reason for this is that for those whose main service is translation, it is a bit easier to schedule and juggle translation projects and then jump online for some interpreting gigs in between, whereas for the person whose main service is interpreting, maintaining work volume can sometimes depend on being "on" and available, and you may have little or no warning at all when your next call will come along, making it a bit more difficult to work around deadlines for translation projects.
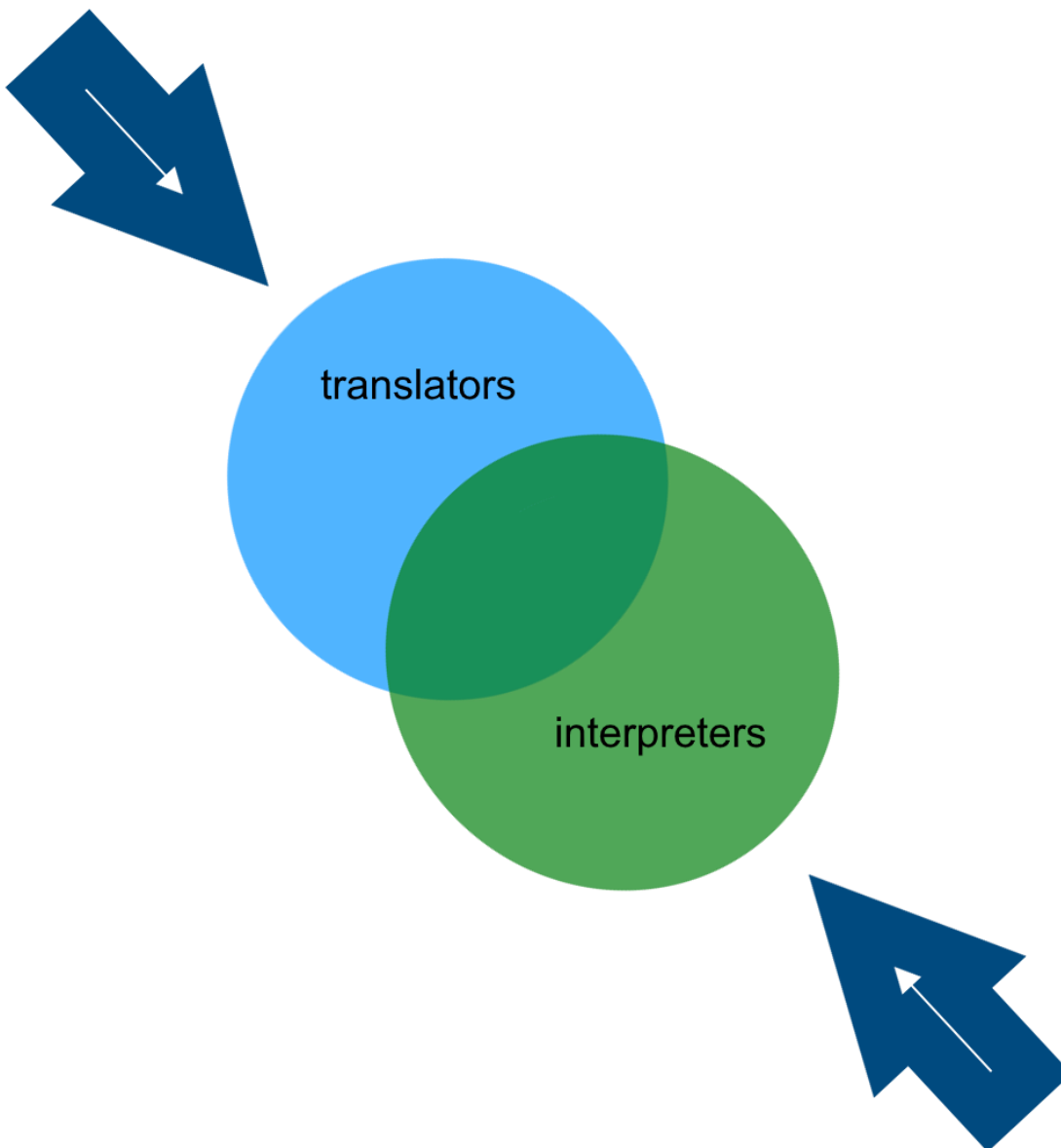
Interpreter quotes:

In the future the role will be of great scale.

Good interpreters are a rare commodity, and in business and in various walks of life, there will always be a need for interpreters to help businessmen, lawyers, NGOs, political bodies. Machines may be able to replace human interpreters in some situations, but for the moment, in the disorganised world I see around me, interpreters are in demand, and are appreciated for their adaptability, their availability, their sensitivity and understanding.

The transinterpretification of things...

The transinterpretification of things is happening not just in terms of who is offering what services. Tools which may traditionally have been considered "translator tools" are also being leveraged by interpreters to do better work. Those not in the know might wonder what an interpreter is doing with a CAT tool, for example. We'll look at this in the "AI and other tech" section of this report.

Interpreter quotes:

The real good ones will never fade.

The world is coming more and more together, we are the bridges to make this happen with more quality.

Any form of translation or interpretation, whether machine or AI-generated, will need a real human brain for verification and evaluation. This stems from the fact that human language is constantly evolving, AI will never be able to distinguish particular nuances.

Remote takes control

The other trend, which was also greatly accelerated by the pandemic, is the growing use of remote interpreting. Pre-pandemic, much of the technology required to loop in an interpreter remotely was already pretty good, and improving. When much of the world was on lockdown, this technology made it possible for many interpreters to continue to reach their clients, and it was pushed to improve and scale more rapidly than it would have on its own. If you were doing in-person interpreting up until then, you probably saw yourself forced to either work remotely or virtually as some called it, or not work at all. Some kinds of interpreting suffered a moment of pause as adjustments were made-- think of all the in-person conferences which were cancelled or postponed until those events found their new online incarnations, for example. Medical interpreting on the other hand, could not afford to pause and probably increased.

Now, in 2023, some of the remoteness has been walked back, at least for the time being. We're seeing this in all industries to some extent or other, as people struggle to go back to the way things were before, while at the same time struggling to strike the right balance between that and incorporating some of the advantageous tech, procedures, and lifestyle that came out of lockdown.

Interpreter quotes:

People have less and less wits because of supercomputering so we interpreters have to do more work in all languages.

The role of interpreters will decrease and devaluate as AI replaces interpreters in spheres where basic language is needed. In spheres such as Medicine, AI needs to be extremely precise and perfected otherwise it may be dangerous, so it will take longer before it can replace interpreters there. I suppose interpreters will also be needed to supervise the quality of AI interpretation.

The future will be interesting and challenging.

Business as newsual

But don't let that fool you-- it won't be back to "business as usual" ever again. Remote interpreting will continue to grow as both hardware and software improve to support it, and it has some clear advantages if we are thinking about the future:

- **It's safer.** In some situations, for example in conflict zones, or some crisis or health related scenarios, adding an in-person interpreter to the mix can be an additional security or health risk.

- **It's faster.** Precious time can be saved by bringing in a remote interpreter, rather than waiting for an interpreter to arrive on site (if one happens to be near enough to make it feasible). This can be especially important in emergency situations, but is also just convenient for the client.

- **It has greater reach.** This reach works from two ends. For the person with the need, if you need an interpreter, it is increasingly easier to get one right away, whereas in years past you may have just had to do without, sometimes in situations where access to language was crucial, life-or-death, even. For the professional providing the service to meet the need, you are less and less bound by your location, and doors are now open to many new clients which may not have been reachable otherwise. If for example you provide interpreting services in African languages, from Africa, you can now reach clients in the US or Europe or anywhere else, with relative ease.

- **And it is more cost-effective.** For the client, the decision of "Do I hire an interpreter for this?" can be made easier if some of the overhead costs normally associated with interpreting in person can be removed from the equation. In situations where not having an interpreter physically present does not jeopardize the quality of the outcome, it just makes good sense to bring them in remotely if you can.
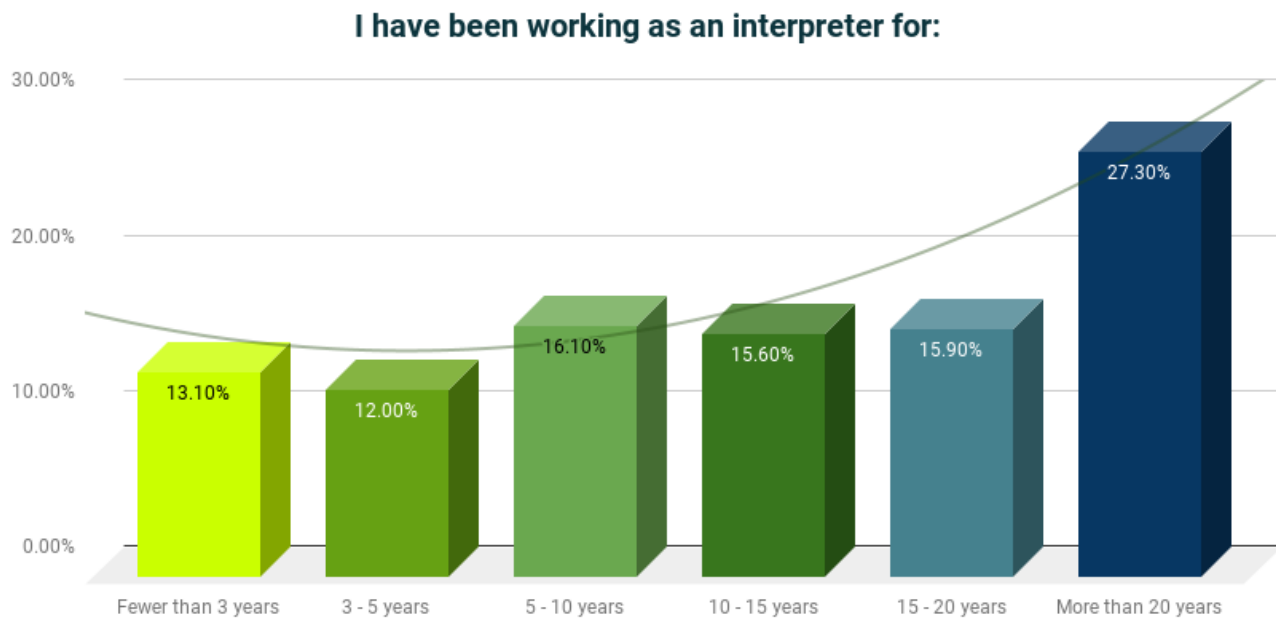
Business as newsual...

The way forward is not without its challenges if you are a remote interpreter now or thinking of becoming one. Let's take a quick look at the current landscape for remote interpreters...

Interpreters, clients, platforms, and volume

I have been working as an interpreter for:

First, there is a healthy distribution of professionals in terms of how many years they have been in the industry. You don't have professionals bunching up on any point of the spectrum, which would be an indicator of either a poor incoming flow of new professionals or an abandonment of veterans in the profession, for example. My guess is that if we were to ask in a year or so, that initial group of "new" interpreters will have grown noticeably, however.

Of the 66% of interpreters who offer interpreting through remote interpreting platforms, most are doing so via more than one platform. The most common reason behind this is the interpreter seeking to ensure a certain volume of work-- and 78% of interpreters would do more interpreting work if it were channeled their way.
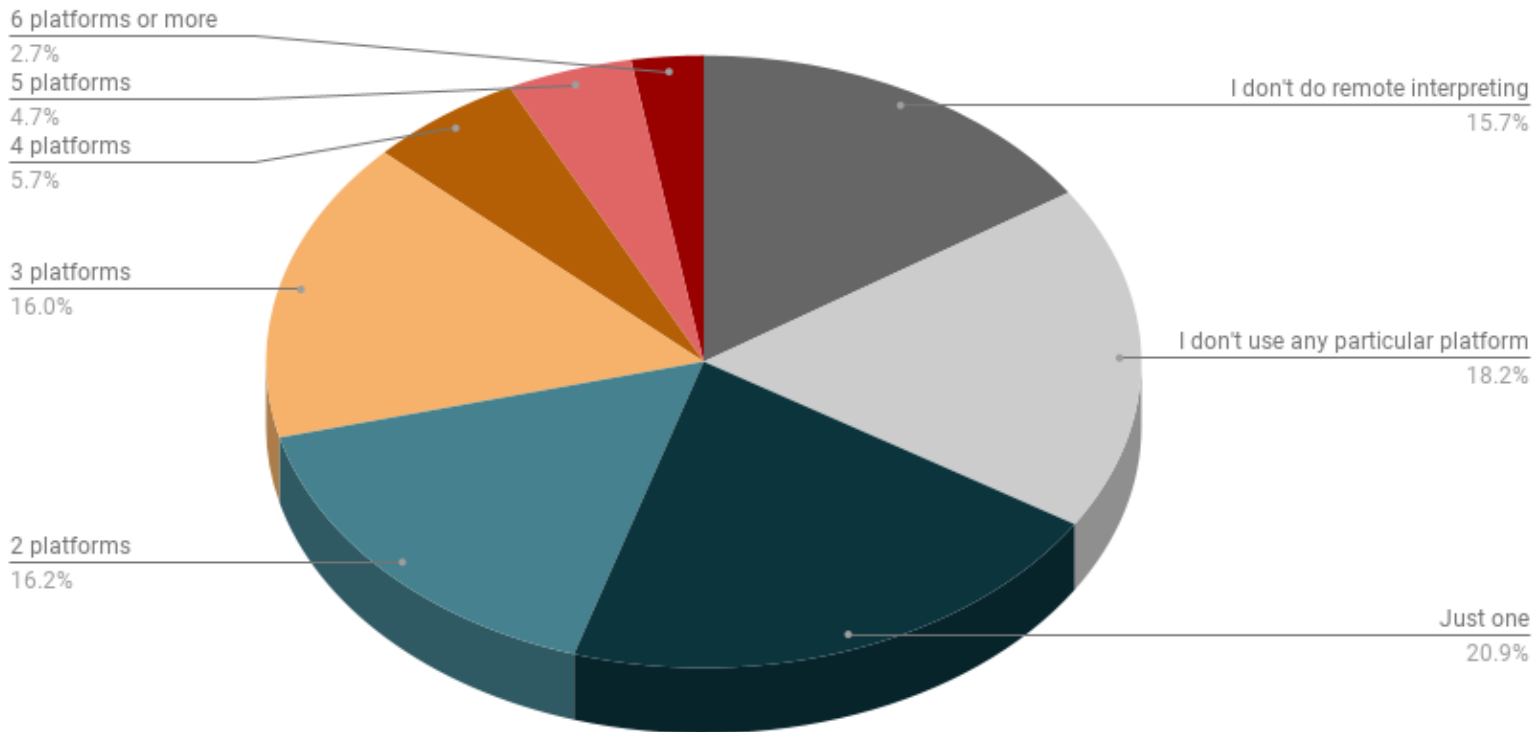
Of those providing their services through more than one platform, around 30% at least occasionally set themselves as active or available on more than one platform at a time in order to ensure better incoming work volume.

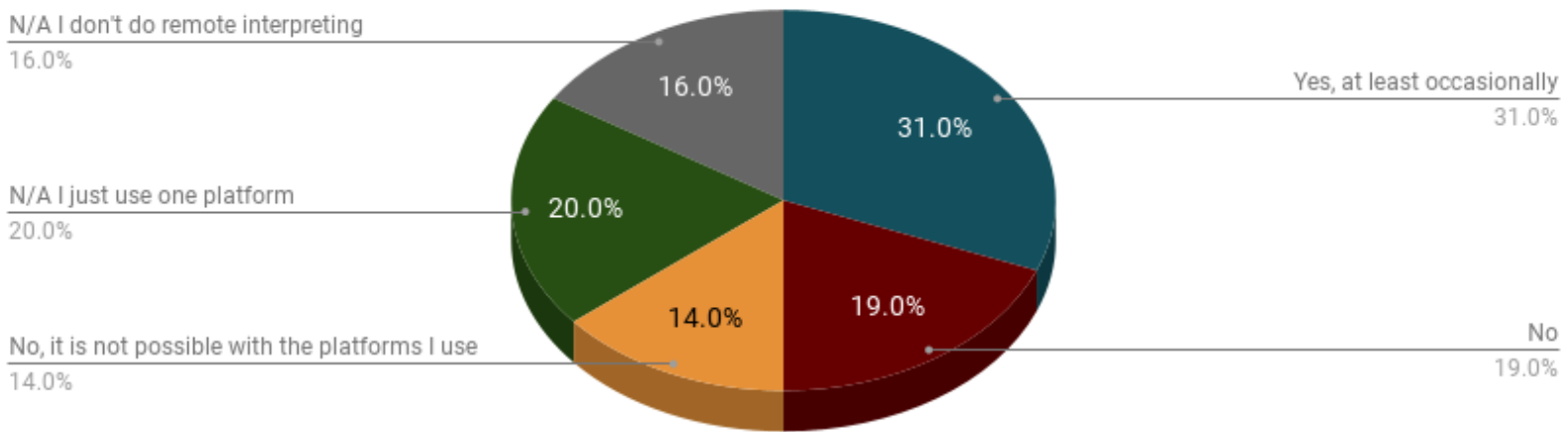# Interpreters, clients, platforms, and volume...

Similarly to the use of translation management systems (TMS) for translation, platforms which facilitate and manage remote interpreting services are productivity boosters for both the client and the service provider, *but,* similarly to what happens in translation, some of this efficiency is lost on the service providers' end when they are required to learn, be proficient, and be present in multiple platforms.
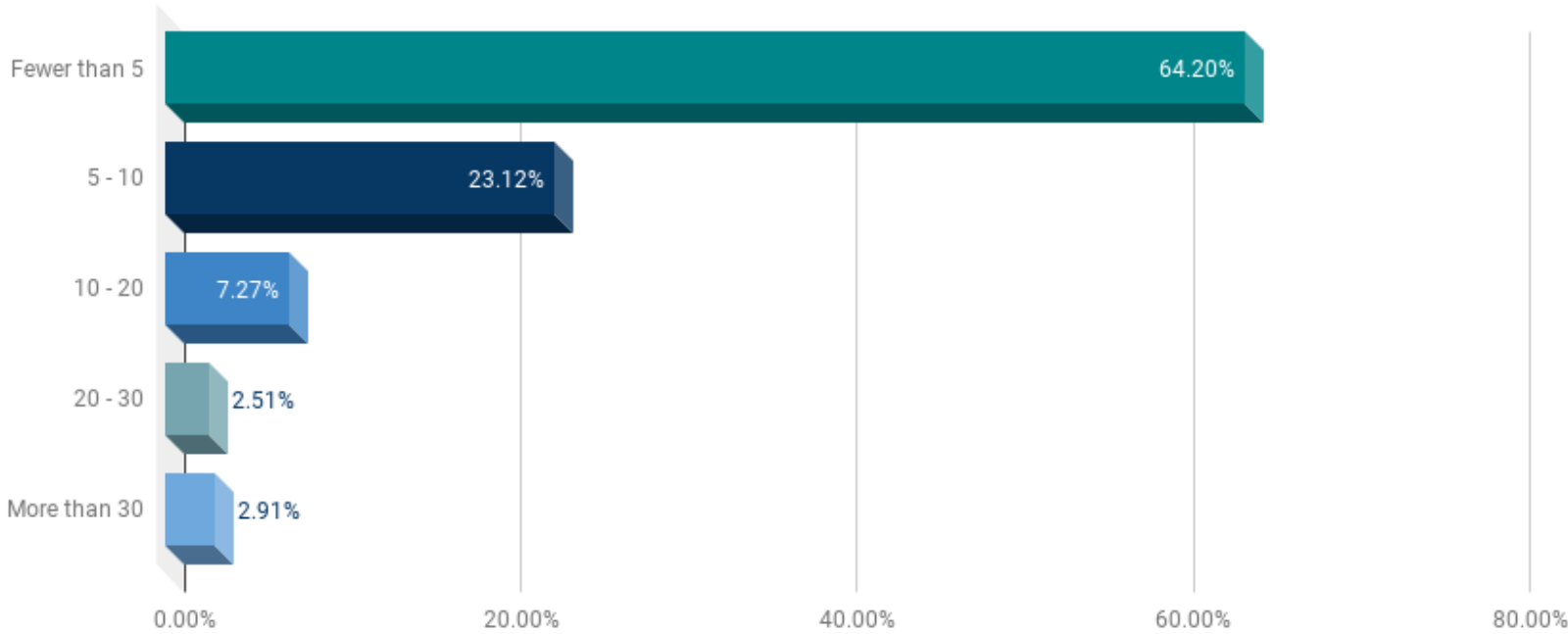
Through how many different platforms do you provide remote interpreting services?

6 platforms or more
2.7%

5 platforms
4.7%

4 platforms
5.7%

3 platforms
16.0%

2 platforms
16.2%

I don't do remote interpreting
15.7%
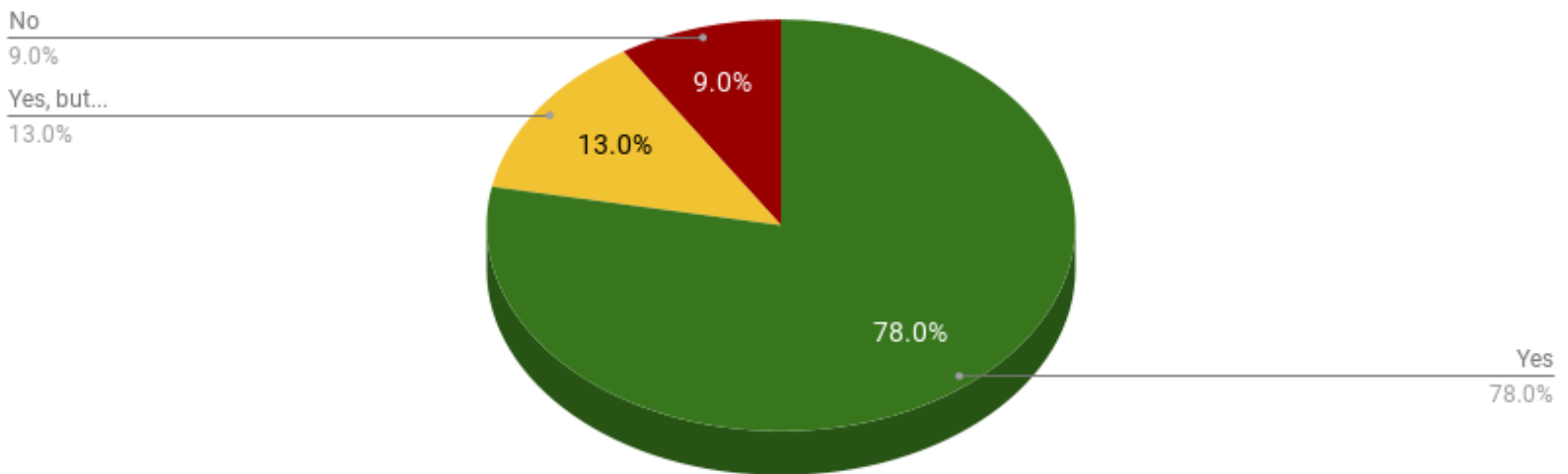
I don't use any particular platform
18.2%

Just one
20.9%

If you do remote interpreting on more than one platform, do you tend to set yourself as active/available on more than one at a time to ensure better incoming work volume?

N/A I don't do remote interpreting
16.0%

N/A I just use one platform
20.0%

No, it is not possible with the platforms I use
14.0%

16.0%

20.0%

14.0%

31.0%

19.0%

Yes, at least occasionally
31.0%

No
19.0%

How many regular interpreting clients do you have at the moment?

Category	Percentage
Fewer than 5	64.20%
5 - 10	23.12%
10 - 20	7.27%
20 - 30	2.51%
More than 30	2.91%

Would you do more interpreting work (volume) if you received it?

Response	Percentage
No	9.0%
Yes, but...	13.0%
Yes	78.0%

Concerns

If you ask an interpreter what concerns them most at the moment, you are likely to get a response that includes one or more of the following:

1. Getting more work/clients (44%)
2. Downward pressure on rates (25%)
3. Advances in tech which are changing how work is done (10%)
4. Keeping up professionally, maintaining quality (10%)
5. Having more time for myself/my family (7%)
6. Having more time for work (4%)
7. And also…

These concerns are common to translation work as well, and to freelancers in all industries in general at the moment.

One concern which was mentioned frequently among interpreters and which is unique to interpreters, was the impact of poor or variable sound quality in remote interpreting, especially in the context of remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI). This is an issue which is frequent enough that at least 5% mentioned it, and it is an issue which impacts not only the quality of the service one can provide, but also potentially the health of at least the provider of the service, so it is worth noting here.

Interpreter quotes:

I think technological advances are favoring the profession of interpreting; however, I believe because we are still in the dark about the potential ways these advances can affect us or be adversely used, we should proceed with caution.

It has opened up the field to more work (shorter, more frequent meetings) but has also commodified the profession to an extent. I appreciate the possibility to work without travelling extensively all the time, which facilitates a better work/life balance, but it can come at an expense to interpreter visibility, contributing to yet more commodification. I have also witnessed how remote work (a behind the scenes existence) has led colleagues to feel less invested in an assignment. I feel this is concerning.

Concerns...

If we look back at that list of interpreter concerns, there is a good deal of interplay between concerns numbers two, three, and four.

Downward pressure on rates is not new, and is not exclusive to interpreting, nor is it exclusive to the language services industry. The language professionals who are doing the best in confronting this challenge tend to be those who have specialized and also invested in that specialization in various ways, thereby being able to provide better quality services more efficiently. They differentiate themselves as specialists, which makes them more attractive to clients, easier to screen, and also allows them to demand better rates than a generalist can expect.

And they are also staying on top of the tech advances which are either changing the way we work, or have the potential to change the way we work. Rather than rejecting all this technology outright, they put in the work to understand it, they leverage it in their favor in their work, and some are going as far as to specialize in certain tools and trends because it helps them work more efficiently and it also allows them to provide expert consultation to their clients on those tools and trends.

Having done this, they are also tending to get more new clients and more work, in general earning more, and they can focus more narrowly on resolving concerns of work-life balance…

Interpreter quotes:

The field of language is incredibly vast and continually changes and evolves. Technological advances may support new tools to improve interpreting but they are far from providing interpreters or clients with a potential replacement for human talent when it comes to translating ideas, thoughts, emotions or views that communicate the same tone and approach intended in different languages.

Remote interpreting allows me to take more interpreting jobs and to diversify my offer [medical/consecutive - market research/webinars]

AI and other tech

Artificial intelligence has been a big subject of discussion in recent years, and that has seemed to have accelerated recently, so, sorry if you are tired of hearing about it at this point. But at least in the language services industry, we seem to have moved beyond the point where the discussion was about where and how AI would be implemented to concrete examples of it being used to provide better and faster services and results, outside of the more narrow use of machine translation for translators, that is.

Interpreters are finding creative ways of leveraging AI and other advances in tech to their benefit. Some of these uses are in the preparation or training process. For example, a common use of ChatGPT and other AI chatbots is to generate texts which can then be turned into speeches using text-to-voice software or functions for general practice, vocabulary acquisition, and preparation for a job.

As things become more *transinterpretified*, interpreters are not limiting themselves to tools which are interpreter-specific. CAT tools and other solutions which have traditionally been considered "translator tools" are being used to make practice and preparation for jobs more efficient, and they are even used on the spot during jobs to increase the interpreter's reaction to changing conditions or to make up for gaps in the preparation the client was able or thought to provide.

Interpreter quotes:

I have used openAI to generate texts incorporating new vocabulary and phrases in the language I am currently working on, then automatic translation plus voice generation to create "speeches" to practice interpreting with this new vocabulary. I have used InterpretBank to memorize new language terms and to quickly search for terms while in the booth.

… thanks to remote interpreting with AI, I'm earning more than in pre-remote-interpreting times.

When interpreting remotely, reading the AI closed captions (voice to text) assists me in my work.

AI and other tech...

Sometimes you're as prepared as can be, but the client has not passed along all the relevant information, or the situation changes near to or during the job. Being mentally quick on your feet is part of being an interpreter, but interpreters are using new tools to make them even quicker to react and adapt to the situation. Tools such as machine translation are useful for prep, but can also be used in the moment to get out of tight spots.

With automatic closed captioning and interpreting software, some have seen a decrease in some types of jobs as clients experiment with this. But just as often, you have a smart interpreter using those same solutions on their end to make their job easier and provide better results.

Being knowledgeable and proficient in new technologies will help you perform better, but it will also put you in a position where you can more professionally respond with ease when your clients are experimenting with the same technologies. For example, responding to a client who is following along on a human-provided interpretation with automated interpreting software and objects when the terms or turns of phrase being provided do not match. Very often, the language professional is more versed in the tool than the client, and being able to effectively share that knowledge can benefit all parties involved.

Interpreter quotes:

I was taken by surprise during a conference. I learned that I would have to interpret a literary text that I was not prepared for. While my colleague was interpreting the lecture, I used OCR software to transform the poor PDF I received into a Word file. After that, I used DeepL to fast translate the text. I had 20 minutes to do this and quickly read the text to get an idea of it. With this draft translation, I could interpret while the actor was acting out the text with much more confidence than I would have done without it.
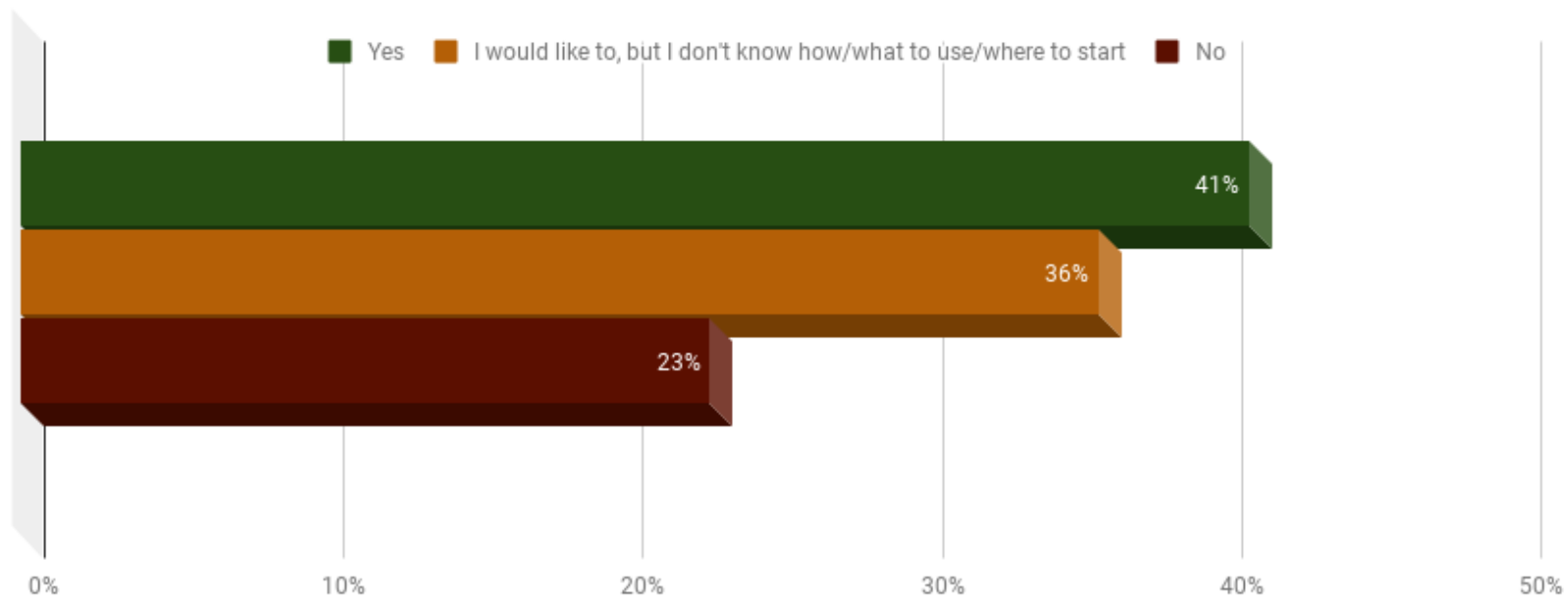
AI and other tech...

Over a thousand interpreters were surveyed earlier this year on some of the information we are looking at here, and with regards to technologies they are leveraging, they were asked to make a list of software, hardware, or other solutions they consider "must haves" for the modern interpreter. The list generated from all of this input is no doubt incomplete, but if you are looking for ideas on how to improve your work, you may find interesting solutions to research and incorporate. The current list is displayed in this ProZ.com blog post, and will be updated as more people contribute to improving it with their recommendations. The list, as it stands as of this writing, is also included here, in an appendix at the end of this report (Appendix: software, hardware and other "must-haves" for the modern interpreter).

In general, would you say that technological advances are favoring the profession of interpreting?
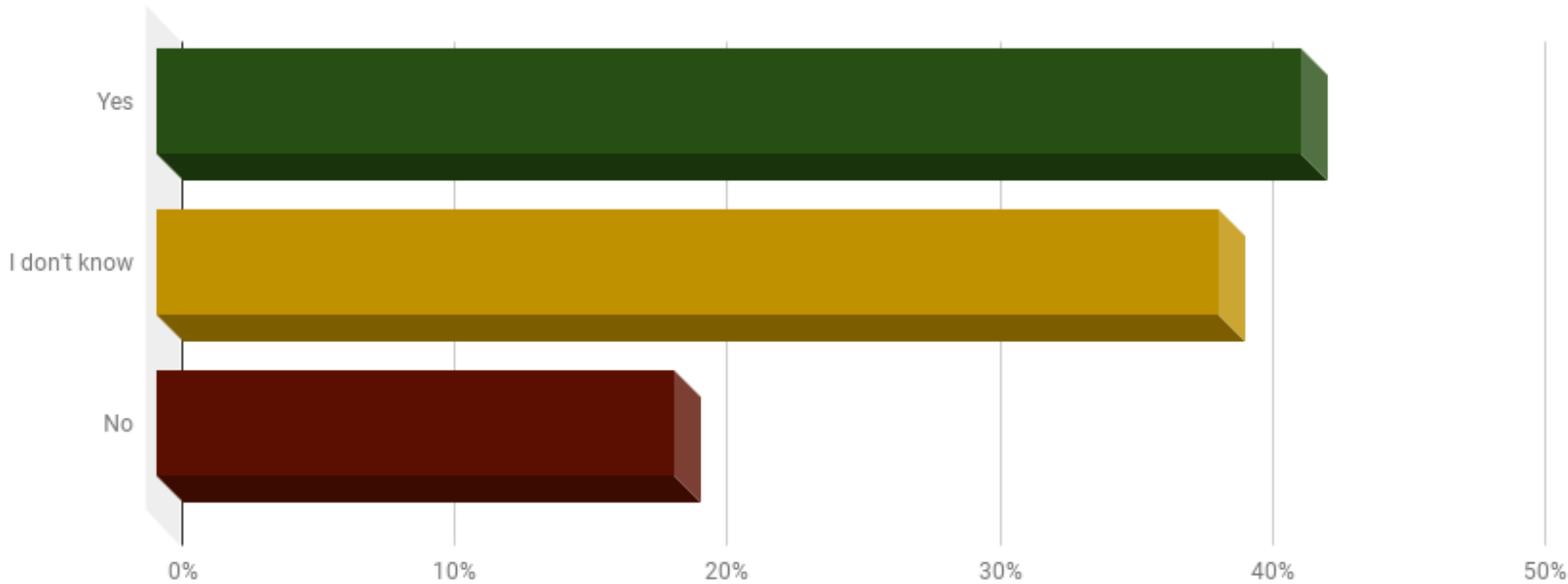
Have you been able to make use of recent advances in technology to increase your productivity and/or quality as an interpreter?

Legend: ■ Yes   ■ I would like to, but I don't know how/what to use/where to start   ■ No

Yes: 41%
I would like to, but I don't know how/what to use/where to start: 36%
No: 23%

Do you know firsthand of at least one case where Artificial Intelligence (AI) has negatively impacted your interpreting work?

Yes
13.0%

13.0%

87.0%

No
87.0%
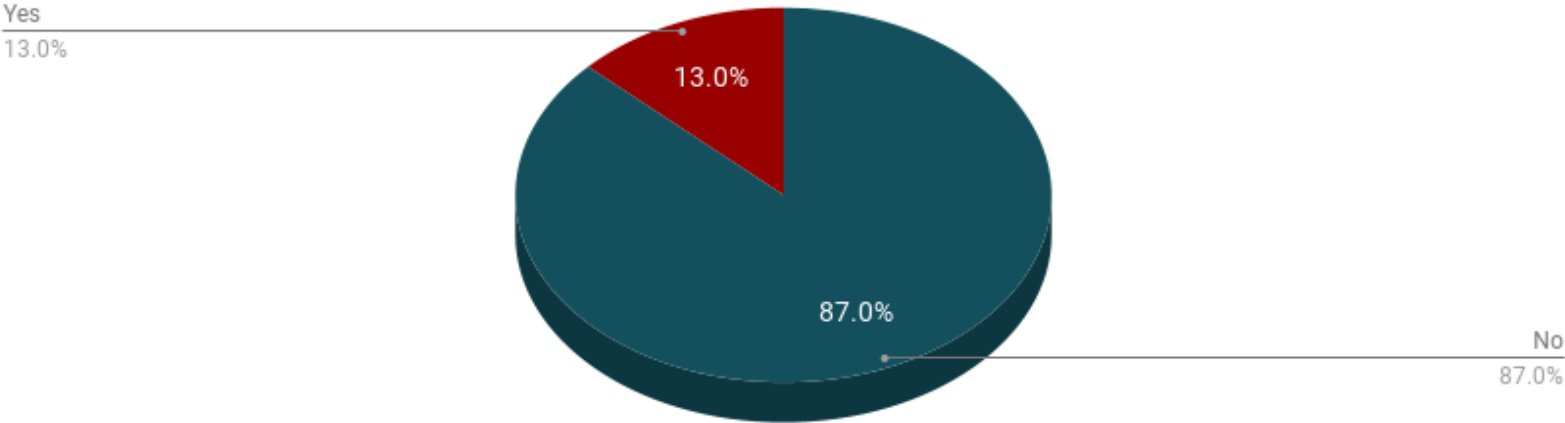
Do you know firsthand of at least one case where Artificial Intelligence (AI) has positively impacted your interpreting work?

Yes
19.0%

19.0%

81.0%

No
81.0%
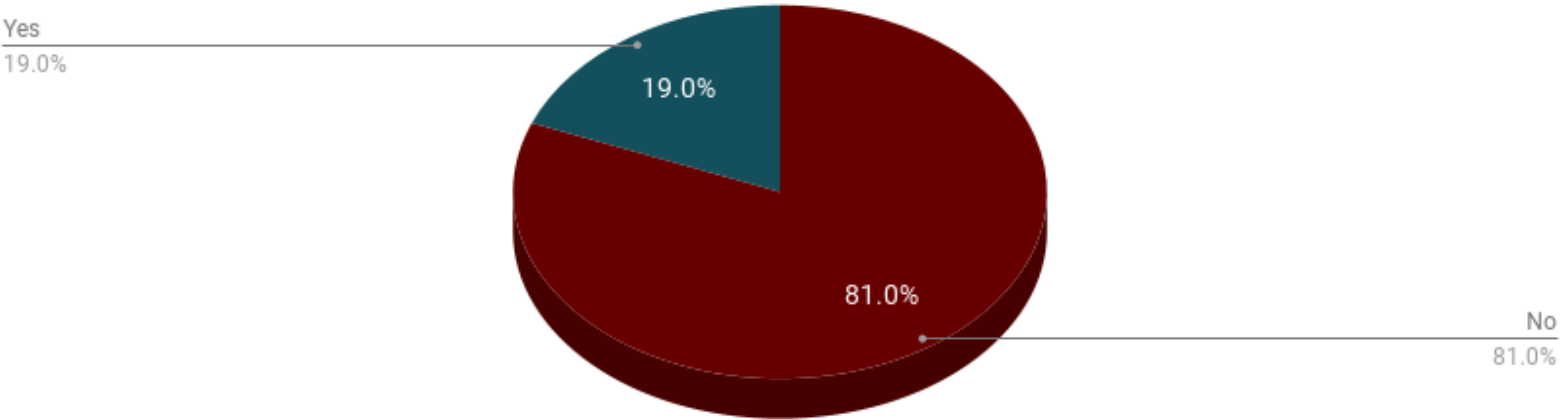
The way forward

There are all kinds of detailed advice and strategies you can follow to do more and better work. Don't rely on what you read here-- use it as a starting point to research further. Do your homework. Network-- join sites and groups where professional interpreters come together and don't isolate yourself from what they are doing and saying. Interpreters and translators alike are exceptional at going out of their way to provide guidance and help to their colleagues.

In general, we can point to these four guidelines, which you probably already take as givens:

1. **Be a specialist.**
2. **Become an expert** on new technologies affecting your work. Be the type of professional a client could approach to consult on AI or other solutions.
3. **Incorporate new technologies** and solutions into your processes, use them to make you faster, stronger, smarter, better.
4. **Invest in your business.** Training, certification, tools, differentiation. You will never see a return on an investment you don't make.

Be a specialist.

It's long been known that specializing is the way to go. Specialists can do it better and faster, and they tend to earn more, so specialize.

Specialize.

Become an expert.

Be the kind of professional others (including your clients) can come to when they want to know what is the best solution for a particular need.

Stay on top of new advances in tech which are affecting or which may potentially affect your work. As mentioned before, language professionals are often more experienced in some of these new solutions by the time their clients start asking about them, and that is a powerful, helpful, and beneficial place to be.

Incorporate the new.

Incorporate the new technologies and other solutions that you can into your work and use them to your advantage. The days where the human language professional could simply speak out against new solutions and refuse to leverage them where they are useful are gone. Interpreters will not be replaced by AI or other tech. Interpreters who do not leverage this and other technologies will be replaced by those who do.

Invest in your business.

And invest in you, and your business. Training, certification, tools, differentiation. This last one is a bit of a no-brainer too, but it is also one which seems to be a difficult hurdle for many, especially those just starting out. But any business-runner who refuses to invest in the business they are running is destined to close that business, sooner or later. And if you are a freelancer, you are the business *and* the business runner.

Remember also that the language services industry has always been, and most likely will continue to be, a very "fragmented" industry. The entity exerting positive force over how you perfect your craft, work better, earn better, differentiate yourself from the competition, and run your business, especially if you are a freelancer, is always going to be *you*.

Over the past year or so, about how many hours of training, certification, or other continuing professional development have you done in support of your work as an interpreter?

Hours	Percentage
1 - 10 hours	28%
10 - 20 hours	15%
20 - 30 hours	8%
30 - 40 hours	6%
40 - 50 hours	5%
50 - 60 hours	3%
60 - 70 hours	1%
70 - 80 hours	1%
80 - 90 hours	1%
90 - 100 hours	3%
More than 100 hours	4%
None	25%
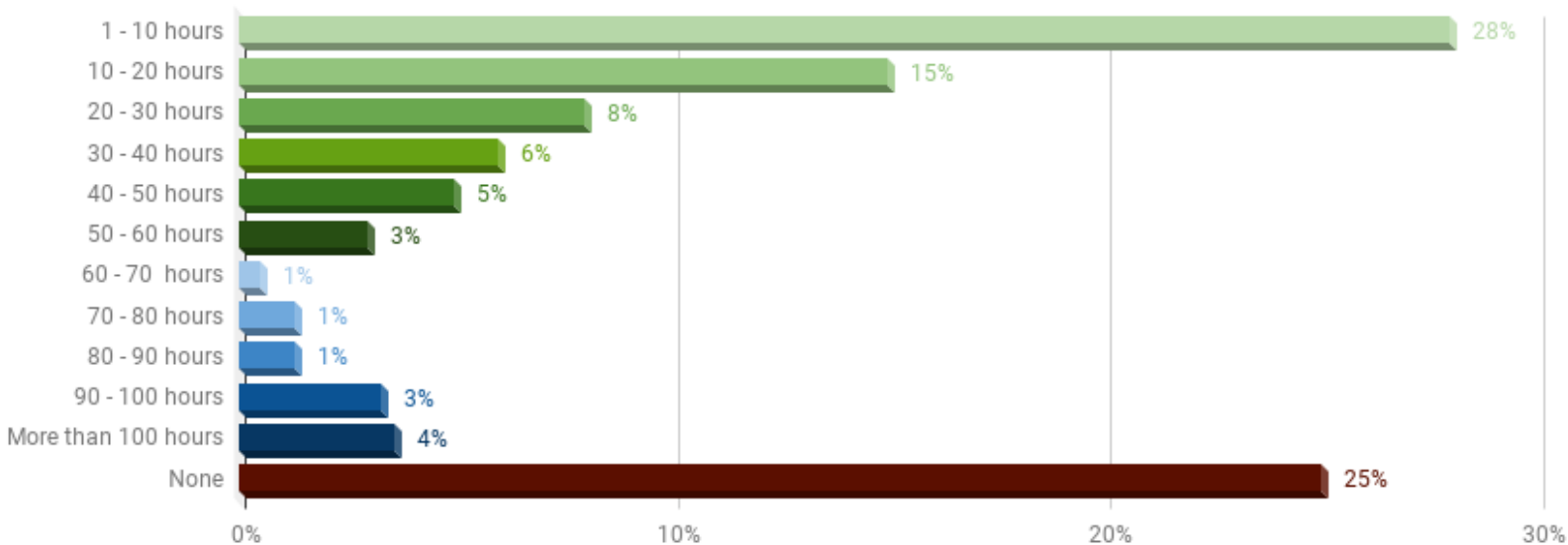
Outlook/Outro

Let's wrap up this overview with some thoughts shared by interpreters on remote interpreting. It's not all rosy, there is some work to be done and improvements that could be made, but it's also a really exciting time to be in the game!

Clients often complain that they had difficulty finding a Georgian interpreter, and at that time I was free and waiting for calls. Hopefully, new technologies will emerge that will make it easier for clients to contact interpreters in a timely and efficient manner.

Being able to work from anywhere is a great advantage in accessing jobs that were previously too distant.

I have increased my productivity by being able to take on more assignments, but remote interpreting not always benefits the quality. Especially court interpreting can be tricky. I have been 'dropped' into court assignments without knowing the type of court, type of hearing, or position of the people on the screen. I wasn't able to support the parent/defendant by explaining what was happening because the clerk did not place us in a separate virtual room. I hope that eventually, we can mitigate those issues to optimise remote interpreting.

I switched most of my interpreting work online and I am loving it. I am able to travel, work remotely, enjoy sunshine whenever I want and still work! Pleasure is no longer linked with holidays only.

Outlook/Outro...

I do have more possibilities to interpret especially via web apps (including video interpreting), but due to an insufficient mobile data network in Europe, it is not possible for me to stay as flexible with it like with regular phone interpreting. The trend is going towards web app interpreting probably because of better possibilities to secure the conversation and the personal data protection. But unfortunately I can provide these services only from my desk, which makes me less flexible.

Zoom and other interpreting platforms allow me to interpret from home without traveling. This allows me to spend more time with my family.

We need to emphasize the importance of the human contact of interpreting where feeling, reacting and experience cannot be replaced with AI.

Interpreters may increasingly use AI-based (speech-to-text) pre-translation to improve accuracy and completeness. Some lower-stakes assignments may become fully automated, prompting full-time interpreters to either specialize in niches that are relatively "safe" from automation and/or branch out into other adjacent fields to supplement their interpreting work.

I think that the role of the interpreter will increase even more in the future, because effective communication between different linguistic groups is an important factor for success in any field in a globalized world.

In general, how likely are you to recommend freelance interpreting to someone who is considering their career options?

Very unlikely
5.9%

Unlikely
12.0%

Unlikely

Very likely

Very likely
23.7%

Neither likely nor unlikely

Neither likely nor unlikely
29.1%

Likely

Likely
29.3%
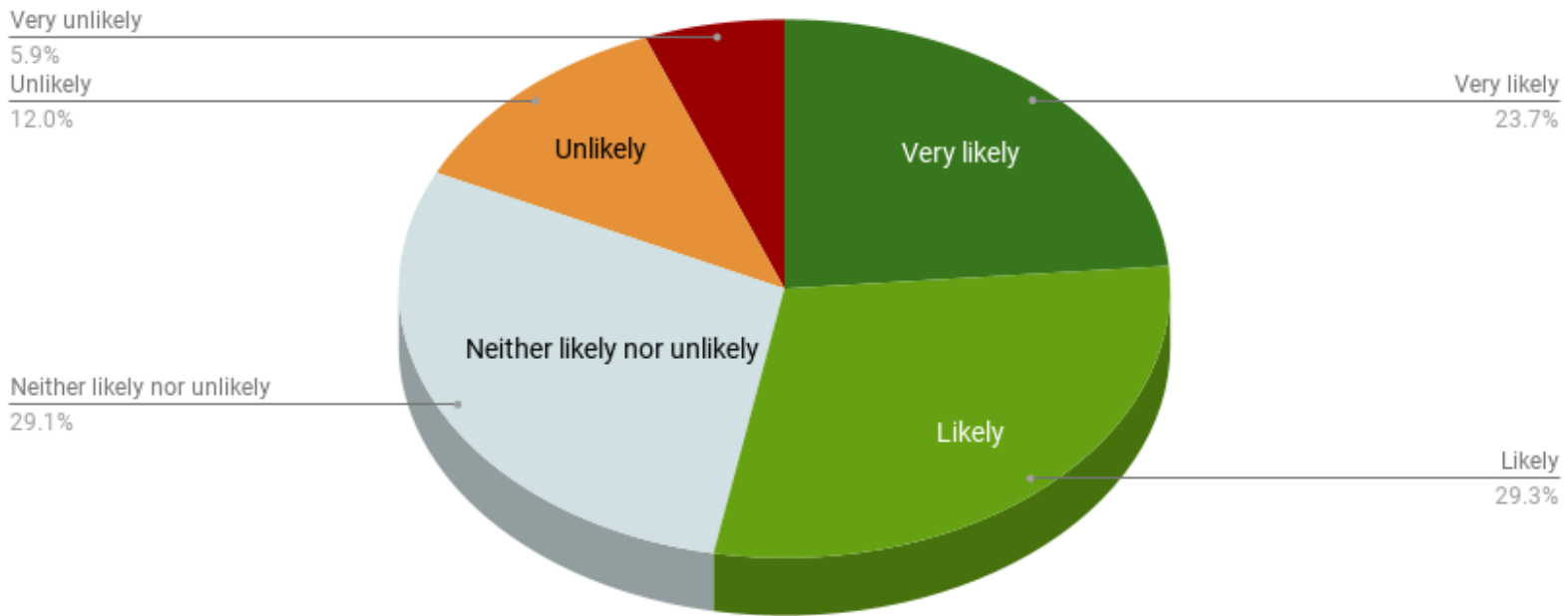
In general, how do you feel about the future of your profession?

Pessimistic
20.5%

Pessimistic

Optimistic

Optimistic
42.1%

Neutral

Neutral
37.3%
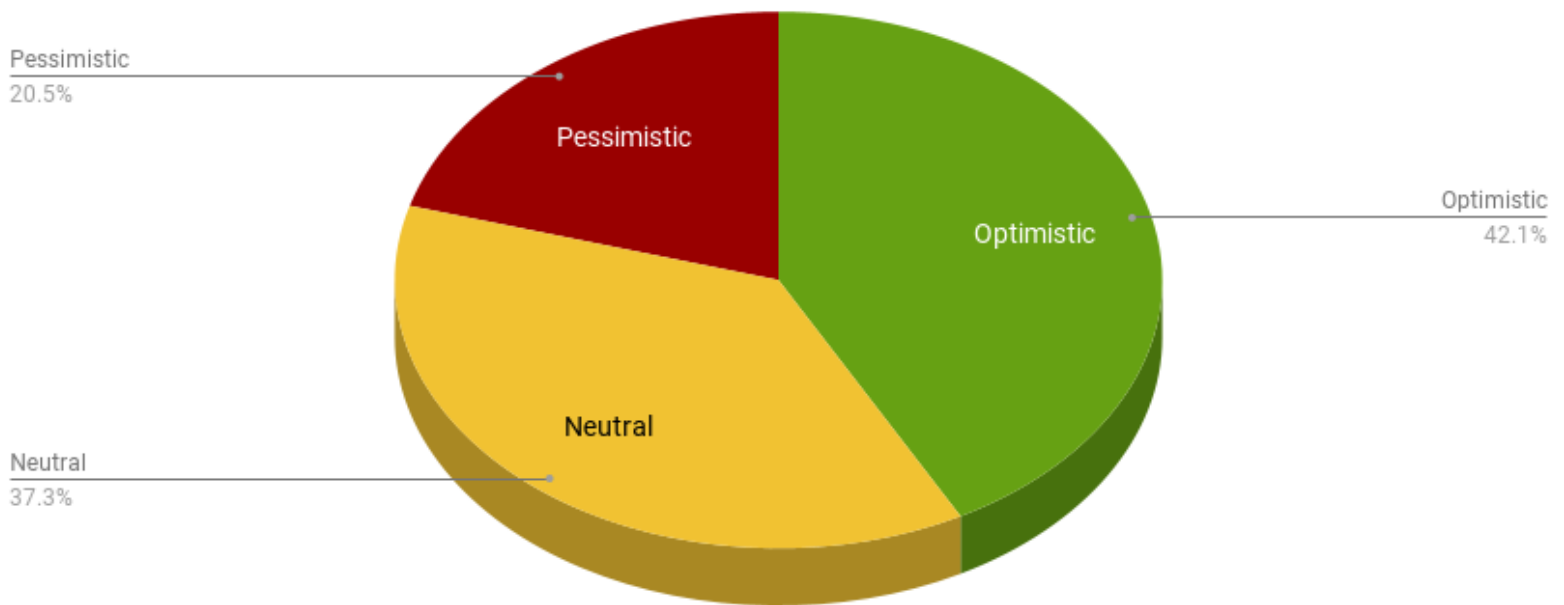
Thank you...

Thanks goes out to all of the interpreters who contributed in one way or another to the information in this overview. And a special thank you to all ProZ.com paying members, since it is your membership investment which makes the work that goes into collecting the information and publishing these reports possible. See you again in the next one.

Selected further reading

Previous industry reports

- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2010:* https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2010
- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2011:* https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2011
- *State of the industry: freelance translators in 2012:* https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2012
- *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
- *The state of the linguist supply chain* (2020) (in conjunction with CSA Research): https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2020-CSA
- ProZ.com industry report: freelance language professionals in 2022: https://www.proz.com/industry-report/2022

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/

Appendix: software, hardware, and other "must haves" for the modern interpreter

Software

Abby Finereader

Almaany

Almaligner

Asana

Audacity

Babylon

Baidu

Bamboo Paper

BandLab

CaptionHub

ChatGPT

Cloud storage (One Drive, Dropbox)

Coffee! 😋

Crowdin

Cymo booth

DeepL

Discord

Dragon NaturallySpeaking

DrawboardPDF

Evernote

FTW Transcriber

Ginger Rephraser

Glosbe

Google Live Caption

Google Live Transcribe

Google Translate

Grammarly

Green Terp

Happy Scribe

InstaText

Interactio

Interplex

Interprefy

InterpretBank

Interpreter Intelligence

Interpreters' Help

iTranslate

Juremy

Krisp

KUDO

KudoZ

LINE

Lingoes

Linguee

Lingvo Live

Mac/iOS Live Captions

MagicSearch

Matecat

Matedub

memoQ

Microsoft Language Portal

Microsoft OneNote

Microsoft Teams

Appendix: software, hardware, and other "must haves" for the modern interpreter...

<u>Software</u>

Microsoft Translator
MultiTerm
Multitran
Notability
Noteshelf
OmegaT
Online Voice Recorder
Otter.ai
Pleco
Qtranslate
Rafiky
Reverso
Skype
Slack
SmarTerp
Smartling
Sogou Translate
Tencent/VooV Meeting
Termium Plus
Trados
Transifex
Trello
Tureng

VEASYT
VLC media player
Vocaroo
Voice Recorder
Voiceboxer
Wacom Notes
WebEx
WhatsApp
Whereby
Windows 11 Live Caption
Wordfast
WordReference
Yandex Translate
Youdao Dictionary
Zoom

Appendix: software, hardware, and other "must haves" for the modern interpreter...

Hardware and other

- Cabled (ethernet, fiber optic where available) internet connection
- Chair (ergonomic, gamer)
- DAC (Digital-to-Analog Converter)
- Double/multiple monitor setup
- Electronic notepad/tablet (iPad, iPad Air, Samsung Tablet S series, Rocketbook)
- External podcasting mic
- External hard drive for backups
- Headset: Sennheiser, Logitech
- High-quality webcam
- Keyboard (ergonomic)
- Silent click mouse
- Stabilizer, UPS, Nobreak
- Stylus (Wacom, Apple Pencil)