

Survey reveals mixed feelings among translators about GenAI tools

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A study published at the end of last year revealed that while nearly a third (29.4%) of professional translators are incorporating generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) into their workflow, the majority remain hesitant or sceptical about its use.

The research, conducted via an anonymous online survey in early 2024, found that the respondents who use GenAI tools do so primarily for tasks related to writing and text refinement rather than direct translation. This suggests that GenAI is used more to enhance translation quality than to increase productivity.

The respondents who do not use GenAI cited concerns over quality, privacy, and the potential erosion of both human creativity and professional standards. Among the most common objections was the fear that reliance on GenAI could lead to a loss of critical thinking skills among translators. Others were worried about job displacement and ethical concerns.

The survey, which collected 425 valid responses, also highlighted a significant association between the use of traditional machine translation (MT) and GenAI. Translators who already use MT in some way during their work are more likely to experiment with GenAI tools. However, even among those adopting GenAI, only 28.8% use it more than half of the time, indicating that most see it as just one of several tools rather than a core component of their workflow.

It also transpired that GenAI is not replacing conventional MT tools such as Google Translate or DeepL. Instead, it is used for subtler tasks, such as finding contextual meanings, rephrasing sentences, shortening and summarising text,



Image created by Michael Farrell using ChatGPT (OpenAI). We asked Michael if he had any images relating to his research. He didn't ... so he asked ChatGPT to create this depiction of St Jerome, the patron saint of translators, 'using AI.' Based in Italy, Michael calls the result: *San Girolamo con AI*.

simplifying language, and finding metaphors, synonyms and definitions. Some translators also turn to GenAI for creative inspiration. Contrary to expectations, its role as an alternative to traditional MT followed by post-editing (MTPE) appears to be relatively limited. ChatGPT emerged as the dominant tool among translators, with 80.8% of GenAI users relying on it, far outpacing alternatives like Microsoft Copilot (29.6%). However, only a small fraction — 20% of users — opt for paid premium versions.

The survey also raised questions about transparency. A striking 80% of GenAI users reported that they do not disclose their use of these tools to clients or employers.

Overall, the study paints a picture of a profession at a crossroads. While GenAI tools are gaining traction, resistance remains strong, and many translators continue to view them with caution.

You can read the full survey result write-up [here](#).