

‘It’s like talking about how I use a pencil’: Journalists’ use of machine translation in their work

Mary Nurminen

Tampere University, Finland

mary.nurminen@tuni.fi

Nina Havumetsä

University of Eastern Finland

nina.havumetsa@uef.fi

Abstract

This paper is the one of the first in-depth accounts of the use of machine translation (MT) by journalists. It reports on a study of Finnish journalists that was conducted mostly in 2024 and comprised an online survey with 68 responses and interviews with 10 journalists. Results revealed that participants fluently integrated MT into a variety of journalistic processes, with an emphasis on using it for assimilation and dissemination; that they relied largely on traditional online MT tools and tended to employ MT mostly with languages they have some competence in; and that they had some awareness of risk and strategies for mitigating it, but could benefit from guidelines and training on using MT. The article contributes to the nascent research on the use of MT in journalism and also to our broader understanding of the paraprofessional use of MT.

1 Introduction

Journalism has long been an international, multilingual field, and linguistic barriers need to be crossed in many work processes before a piece of news reaches its audience (see Valdeón, 2015, 2020 and Ping, 2021 for overviews). This is true for reporting about foreign events but also when producing domestic news, since we live in multilingual societies with globally connected economies. For these reasons, translation has been an integral part of journalistic processes for many years (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009). Although few journalists label themselves as translators (*ibid.*; see also Scammell and Bielsa, 2022: 1434), they nevertheless have been found to perform translation in various stages of their work.

Despite this translatorial activity, journalists are seldom trained in translation or interpreting, nor do they often have experience in providing professional translation services. We can consider them to be engaged in paraprofessional translation, or the ‘written and oral re-rendering of content across languages, at work, by people in their professional/paid capacity that is other than translating/interpreting’ (Koskinen, 2025: 37). Indeed, society relies on journalists to disseminate translated information on important matters, possibly to very large audiences (Watson, 2018; Nieminen, 2024).

Considering this paraprofessional engagement with translation, it would seem logical that journalists might also employ machine translation (MT) in their work. However, to date there is little research that explores this assumption. MT has received a few mentions in research on translation in journalistic processes (see, e.g., van Rooyen, 2018; Matsushita, 2019) or has been noted as an area that requires further study (Song, 2020). But to the best of our knowledge, studies of actual use are limited (see Nurminen, 2023; Havumetsä and Nurminen, 2025).

This lack of research and gap in knowledge led us, at the tail end of a different project (Havumetsä and Nurminen, 2025), to interview one journalist specifically about their MT use. Encouraged by the results, we launched a new project, focused entirely on paraprofessional MT use in journalism, with that interview providing the first data. We conducted a survey and nine more interviews exploring the use of MT technology by journalists in Finland. Our research questions involved how journalists use MT in their work, what processes they use it in, what their motivations are for using it, and how they view and mitigate the risks involved in relying on MT.

2 Background

2.1 The journalistic translation process

The journalistic translation process is described in detail by Perrin and Ehrensberger-Dow (2012; 2018: 163), who studied journalists working with multilingual source materials that did not originate from news agencies. According to Perrin and Ehrensberger-Dow (2012: 367), ‘rather than being a separate process, translation is ubiquitous and interacts with newswriting at all levels and stages’. The process begins with a consideration of the content and goals of the story, during which the journalist makes translation-related decisions that affect the end product (ibid.: 366–367). These decisions include selecting the type of translation (in TV news, the choice might be between dubbing, voice-over or subtitling) and choices of social significance, such as which representatives of the source culture will be given a voice in the target language story. Next, the translation itself is performed, and finally, the translated parts are checked and edited along with other parts of the story. During the translation process, the journalist reads background material and cites sources that were spoken or written in different languages. In performing these tasks, they draw on their own linguistic expertise and on the language resources available to them. The process takes place within the social community of the newsroom, which may include translators. It concludes with the publication of the story in the media (Perrin and Ehrensberger-Dow, 2012: 366–367).

Apart from news organisations that serve the public directly, news is produced and translated in global and national news agencies (see, e.g., Bassnett and Bielsa, 2009; Davier, 2021). The guiding principles of news production, such as accuracy, are shared widely across different types of news organisations (see Reuters, n.d.; Council for Mass Media in Finland, n.d.), and thus the basic journalistic processes may be expected to have many similarities and be constrained by the same factors. One of those factors is time pressure (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009: 68–68; Davier, 2022: 40), which may influence the journalists’ choice of translation methods and tools.

2.2 Machine translation use in journalism

As mentioned previously, little research has been done on how journalists employ MT. Some studies have examined potential MT use cases in

journalism. The GoURMET project¹, which focused on creating MT solutions for the journalism industry, outlined potential use cases for MT (Secker et al., 2019). Song (2020) used an issue of human news translation to explore the implications of potential use of MT to translate the same passage. Navarro (2012) discussed the effects of using MT in the news publishing process but did not examine actual use.

A few articles do mention, or focus solely on, ongoing use of MT by journalists. Studies by Matsushita (2019) and van Rooyen (2018) included anecdotal mentions of MT use in newsrooms. Nurminen (2023) examined a case study of one journalist’s use of MT at work and published the findings as a first-person narrative. Havumetsä and Nurminen’s (2025) article on journalists who produce domestic news for linguistic minority groups in public service media also offered an account of their MT use.

One important feature of both journalism and paraprofessional MT use is an inherent risk and the need for awareness and active management of that risk. In research on journalism, two interconnected types of risk have been identified: credibility risk, which can lead to a loss of trust in the journalist or the media they represent; and communicative risk, which can cause misunderstandings (Matsushita, 2015: 46, 59–60; Davier, 2022). In MT user research, studies have focused on data security risks (Canfora and Ottmann, 2020; Nitzke et al., 2019), risks in the variability of MT output (Koponen and Nurminen, 2024), and risks that arise from the use of MT in safety-critical contexts (e.g., Vieira et al., 2020). A few studies outline how such risks might be managed (Koponen and Nurminen, 2024; Canfora and Ottmann, 2020).

2.3 Machine translation use in other professions

Although there is little research to date on how MT is used in journalistic work, evidence is growing of MT being employed in a paraprofessional way in other workplaces that are not involved in professional translation. This includes professions that, similarly to journalism, are entrusted with producing reliable information on public matters.

One recent area of interest in research involves the use of MT by public service employees. Two recent projects employed the same survey to study employees from across all sectors of public ser-

¹ <https://gourmet-project.eu/>

vices, one in the UK (Vieira, 2024) and the other in Finland (İlkılıç et al., 2026). Other studies have examined MT use in one specific sector, including in areas such as immigration (e.g., Vieira, 2024; Ciribuco, 2020) and healthcare (e.g., Valdez and Guerbero-Arenas, 2025; Zappatore and Ruggieri, 2024).

Paraprofessional MT use has also been studied in fields such as technical support (Gonçalves et al., 2022), academic research (Toledo-Báez and Marín Navarro, 2025), patenting (Nurminen, 2020) and the legal field (Kourouni and O'Shea, 2025). For an overview of workplace MT, see Nurminen (2025).

2.4 Technology landscape at time of study

The first data for this study was collected in an interview in October 2023 and the rest was gathered in April–June 2024 (see Section 3 for details). At that time, the predominant technology in the free online systems used by the respondents of this study was neural MT. Both Google (Caswell, 2024) and DeepL (DeepL, 2024) would announce the beginning of large language model (LLM) integration to their tools just after our data collection was completed in June 2024. However, OpenAI had launched the ChatGPT generative AI tool in November 2022 (Open AI, 2022) and at the time we gathered our data, the use of it and other generative AI tools was growing.

This study's data reflects the landscape described here, with 'traditional MT tools such as Google Translate or DeepL' being named as a commonly used tool by 98% of survey respondents, while only 10% used the translation function of an LLM such as ChatGPT. However, all interviewees reported that their media organisations had recently introduced or were planning to introduce company-specific LLMs.

3 Methods and data

We collected data from journalists working in Finnish news organisations through an anonymous online survey and ten interviews, providing us with both quantitative and qualitative data. We used a two-step process of recruiting, first inviting people to take the survey and then including a question in the survey about willingness to participate in an interview. An overview of the data is shown in Table 1.

	Number of informants	Data-gathering period
Survey	68	25 April–25 May 2024
Interviews	10	October 2023 + June 2024

Table 1. Overview of data gathered.

This sample size was relatively small and did not allow us to generalise the results of this study. However, the data gathered did allow us to obtain an overview as well as in-depth descriptions of participants' MT use, which served our goal of conducting an exploratory study. The current article reports on many of the results of the study, while others will be forthcoming in future papers.

3.1 Survey

To begin the design of our survey, we analysed the survey employed by Matsushita (2019: 151–153) to explore journalists' contact with foreign languages in their work and their thoughts on (human) translation. We then consulted studies on MT and the media field (Nurminen, 2023; Havumetsä and Nurminen, 2025; Secker et al., 2019), and research on the use of MT in other professions (e.g., Vieira et al., 2020; Ehrensberger-Dow et al., 2023). To ensure that the questions were as relevant and clear as possible, we had the survey reviewed by four researchers from outside our project. It was translated into Finnish by one of the authors and administered in that language. The survey includes both closed and open-ended questions and the English version is available in Appendix A.

In recruiting participants for the survey, our aim was to gather as many responses as possible rather than to achieve a statistically representative sample of Finnish journalists, which we considered to be an unfeasible goal. We employed a double strategy of a general call for participation posted through the member channels of a few journalist organizations², and by sending emails directly to journalists. We gathered the email addresses from the websites of the top 3 national newspapers and the 13 largest regional newspapers as measured by readership (Media Metrics Finland, 2023). We calculated that such a combination covered not only the largest readership but also included comprehensive regional and language coverage. We also decided to include Finland's public broad-

² Union of Journalists in Finland (Journalistiliitto) and the Finnish Association of Science Editors and Journalists (Suomen tiedetoimittajain liitto).

caster Yle, commercial TV broadcaster MTV3 and Finnish News Agency STT. Our analysis of the survey responses shows that most respondents appear to work in media that serves the public directly. However, material may also include responses from news agency journalists.

All participants in the survey were informed of the purpose of the study and the voluntary and anonymous nature of their participation. The survey included a final question that asked for respondents willing to participate in an interview to submit their email addresses. Submission took place separately from survey responses to retain anonymity.

The survey resulted in 69 responses. One response was discarded as not fitting the target respondent profile, so the final number analysed was 68. The survey's numerical data was collated and analysed quantitatively while the answers to open-ended questions went through qualitative analysis.

3.2 Interviews

We began the development of our interview base from questions used in our own past projects (Nurminen, n.d.; Havumetsä and Nurminen, 2025) and used the initial version of the base in our first interview (see Section 1). Later in the process, we reviewed that interview and the information we received from the survey, then added questions to probe more deeply into areas of interest that emerged in the results. We included questions on the interviewees' 1) education and experience in journalism, 2) language skills, 3) current work, 4) use of MT tools, 5) perceived risks and thoughts on the ethics of using MT at work, 6) employer's guidelines and shared principles in the workplace, and 7) thoughts on the impact of MT use on journalism. In the present study, we report on the findings from themes 1–5.

The recruitment of interviewees through the survey resulted in a total of nine interviews. As mentioned previously, this was in addition to one interview that took place earlier (see Section 1). As part of the recruitment process, potential interviewees were informed in writing of the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, as well as the fact that the interviews would be conducted in Microsoft Teams and recorded for further analysis. All provided written consent. Since the interviews did not involve any of the issues that would require an ethical review according to the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019: 19), no such review was conducted.

All interviewees were journalists from organisations that publish news directly to the public. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Finnish, with both of this paper's authors acting as interviewers in all cases. The flexibility of semi-structured interviewing allowed us to adapt our questions to the individual background, manner of working and opinions of each interviewee. The recorded interviews were stored in the research institution's secure environment.

The 10 interviews resulted in a collective 12 hours and 9 minutes of recording and approximately 472 pages of raw automated transcription. We first pseudonymised and thoroughly edited the automated transcripts, focusing on accurately capturing participants' speech. Relying on the principles of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), we developed an initial code list based on our research questions. During our first round of coding in Atlas.ti, we added themes that emerged from the data and eventually agreed on 28 codes focused on working contexts and machine translation use. We employed two rounds of consistency checks and further editing. The material was then analysed to form a detailed illustration of the use of MT by the interviewees. All material remained in its original Finnish throughout transcription and analysis; only quotations used in reporting were translated into English.

4 Results

4.1 Respondents

A relatively high number of the total of 68 respondents had significant experience in journalism, with 52% being in the profession for more than 15 years. This was followed by 24% having 3–6 years of experience, 13% with 11–15 years, 7% with 7–10 years, and 4% being in the profession for 0–2 years.

A majority of the journalists who answered the survey, 60%, reported working for media organisations that operate on the national level, while 35% work for organisations with a regional scope and 4% on a local level. The topics most often covered by each journalist included, in descending order of mentions: domestic news, politics and society, local news, foreign news, the economy, culture, health and lifestyle, sports, science, agriculture and forestry.

The respondents' work is relatively multilingual. Asked how often they need to use a foreign language or understand something in a foreign language at work, 57% replied 'at least several

times a week', 24% 'several times a month', and 19% 'less than once a month'. This multilingual need was partially met with the journalists' own foreign language competences. Asked to list the languages they knew well enough to read background information in them, 100% listed English as well as Finnish. Finland's second national language, Swedish, was listed by 78% of respondents. These were followed by German, French, and Norwegian, all of which at least 10% of respondents had competence in, and then several other languages that were mentioned by a few respondents.

The interviewees represented seven different Finnish media companies, three of which operate on the national level, three on the regional level, and one on both national and regional levels. A diversity of information channels were represented: five of the companies work in traditional print news and two in television, while all also publish news in the internet. The geographical reach of the companies encompassed the southern, western and eastern parts of Finland but left out northern Finland.

4.2 Overview of MT use

Of the 68 survey respondents, 6 indicated that they do not use MT at work. These respondents were re-directed to the latter part of the survey, skipping all questions that dealt with their use of MT. Therefore, some of the survey results in this article include all 68 responses while others were answered only by the 62 MT users. It was interesting, however, that the six non-MT-using respondents wanted to answer a survey on a technology they do not use themselves.

Of the 62 who do use MT at work, 35% reported using it at least a few times a week, 36% a few times a month, and 29% less than a few times a month. One of the interviewees, I10, described it

as just one of many tools they use in their work, as necessary and mundane as a computer. Being interviewed about it was, in their opinion, like talking about how they use a pencil.

We asked respondents about the MT tools they use most often and the results are presented in Figure 1.

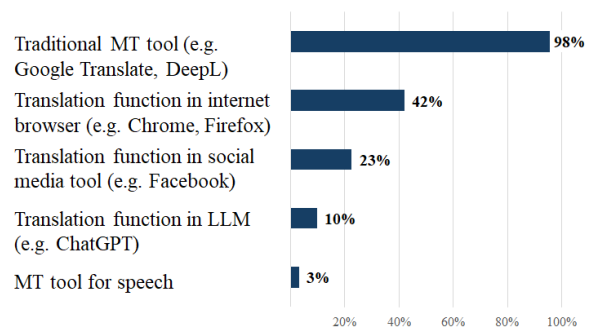


Figure 1. What MT tools do you use at work? Choose a maximum of 3 tools that you use most often (Q13), n=62.

At the time of this survey, the traditional MT tools still held a very strong position while the recently introduced generative AI tools were just starting to be used. Another interesting finding was that the use of the translation function in internet browsers had grown in popularity compared to results in previous studies (Gaspari, 2007: 104; Vieira, 2024: 13). Speech translation tools were used by a very small number of respondents.

4.3 Languages and MT

One of the most prevalent findings of this study was that journalists have a strong tendency to use MT with languages they have some level of proficiency in. Evidence of this tendency emerged in the survey as well as in the interviews, both in conjunction with direct questions and spontaneously in answers to questions on other topics.

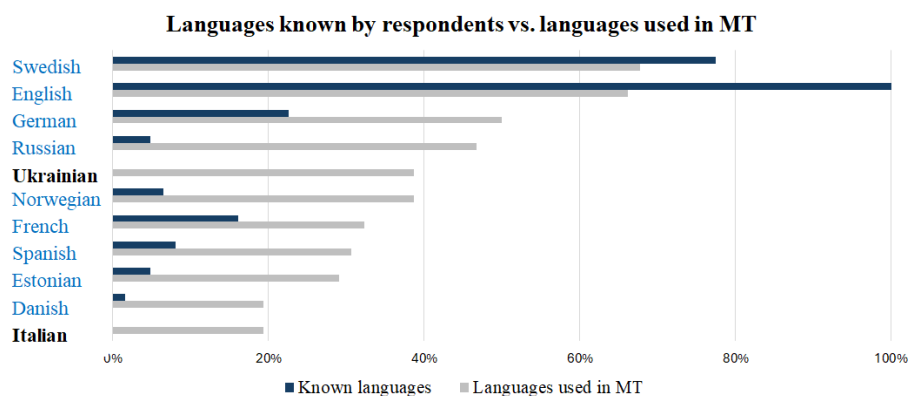


Figure 2. Languages MT used with (Q11) compared to languages of proficiency (Q6). The languages shown in unbolded blue were among the top 11 languages respondents reported proficiency in, n=62.

The survey addressed the issue of language in several questions. Figure 2 compares the results of question 6, ‘What languages do you know well enough that you can read background information in them?’ and question 11, ‘What languages have you translated using MT in the past year?’ In the figure, the languages shown in blue were among the top 11 most cited languages of proficiency of the respondents. The first conclusion to be made from the figure, therefore, is that overall, the most frequent MT use tends to occur specifically with languages journalists have some command of. This was also illustrated by interviewee I1³:

I think there are a lot of people who would say, if I don't know that language, I'm not going to [machine] translate it. Many have that kind of principle. (I1)

The tendency to use MT with known languages is most evident with Swedish and English, both taught extensively in Finnish schools and both showing high proficiency levels and high levels of MT use.

Beyond Swedish and English, however, a discrepancy is revealed between the numbers of respondents who report using MT with a language and those that report proficiency in that language. With all other top languages, the use of MT is higher than the reported competence in the language. This implies that MT is indeed sometimes being used with languages of lesser or no competence.

A more nuanced exploration of this seeming discrepancy emerged from the interview data. First, the survey question involved a level of language competence that would allow journalists ‘to read background information in it’. However, a somewhat lower level was sometimes expressed as sufficient by interviewees. They also mentioned that competence in a related language could give them confidence in using MT. For example, if they know some French or Spanish, they might be more confident in using MT with Italian.

Another survey question asked journalists about the circumstances under which they would be willing to write news items based on machine-translated texts (Figure 3). A full 72% of respondents stated that they would base a news item on machine-translated information only if they have a good or somewhat good command of the original text’s language. A second important finding was

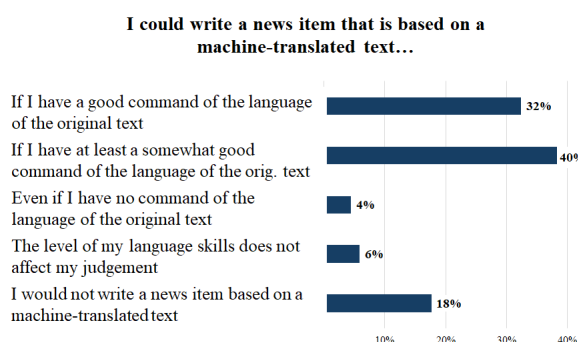


Figure 3. I could write a news item that is based on a machine-translated text... (Q18), n=68.

that 12 respondents (18%) said they would not write news items based on machine-translated texts. This is a higher number of responses than the six who indicated they do not use MT at all, implying that there are respondents who are willing to use MT for some things, but would not base news stories on it.

4.4 Journalistic processes in which MT is used

Another of our main research questions involved the processes journalists are working in when they turn to MT. This important facet of the study of MT users can help us build a more robust understanding of the various contexts and conditions under which MT can be usable and helpful.

In the survey, we first asked about the multilingual work processes the respondents encounter in their work. In a later question we inquired which of those processes they use MT in. Figure 4 contains a comparison of the two.

Assimilation appears to be the top purposes journalists have for employing MT. Three of the four most commonly cited processes that involve multilingual needs concern background reading, including the processes of gathering information for news items, following other media, and reading foreign-language media to review potential news topics. These are also some of the top processes in which MT is used, with 49–71% of MT-using respondents stating they are engaged in these activities when they employ MT.

The results also indicate that dissemination is an important purpose for using MT. The third most commonly cited process with multilingual needs, as well as third for MT use, was translating text or

³ All quotations were translated from Finnish to English by the authors.

Journalistic processes with multilingual needs vs. processes in which MT used

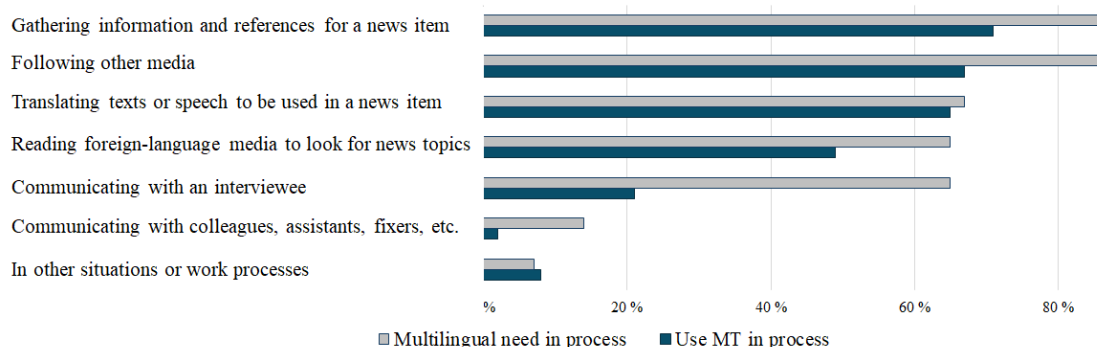


Figure 4. Multilingual work processes the MT-using respondents encounter (Q9) compared to the use of MT in those processes (Q10), n=62

speech for use in a news item. As revealed by Figure 4, this is also the process in which the bars showing multilingual needs and the use of MT are closest to each other, indicating that multilingual needs are most often addressed by the use of MT. Nearly all of the respondents who reported needing to translate text or speech for their target language news items also reported employing MT to help them in some part of the process.

An interesting question concerns if journalists post-edit machine-translated material before dissemination. While the survey did not address this question, evidence of it emerged in interviews. As described by interviewee I1 below, translated texts are often post-edited prior to publishing:

I should of course stress that Google Translate's text never goes directly into a news item, but rather it's read and then a real translation is done, because it makes a lot of mistakes when translating from many languages [...] The sentence structures are so different that sometimes the translations are really weird. (I1)

Through editing the MT output, the journalists also appear to take responsibility for the translations and transform them into a part of their own stories. Interviewee I6 pointed out that:

As a journalist I need to be the one who wrote the stories. [...] I wouldn't feel at all comfortable just copying some decent-looking ready-made text [...]

Finally, Figure 4 reveals that the processes in which survey respondents were least likely to use MT to overcome linguistic barriers were those involving communication with other people, including people they interview for news items. This was supported by the response to another question

With the help of machine translation, journalists can interview people with whom they do not share a language.

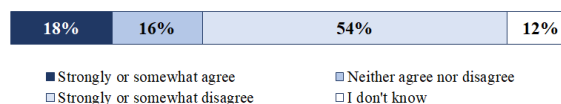


Figure 5. Agreement with the statement, 'With the help of machine translation, journalists can interview people with whom they do not share a language' (Q16), n=68.

regarding the use of MT in interviews, which respondents tended to disagree with (Figure 5).

Further support came in replies to an open-ended question inviting the respondents to describe the three most important multilingual situations in which they have used MT. Out of 50 respondents, only 3 mentioned conducting an interview with speech translation tools.

However, journalistic interviewing requires other communication than that which takes place in the interview itself, and evidence emerged of participants sometimes using MT in other interview-related processes. These include negotiating interviews, translating interview questions, and translating the final Finnish story into the language of the interview to enable the interviewee to check their quotes, as is required by the Journalist's Guidelines (Council for Mass Media in Finland, n.d.). Respondents also described using MT or other AI tools to translate interview transcripts:

My other main way of using [MT] is to translate, for instance, Reuters' English-language video scripts, transcripts and news texts. I often translate them with ChatGPT, because I can ask it to edit the text at the same time.

Others use a tool to produce automated transcripts, which they then translate with MT to speed up reading or to locate specific sections of the interview more easily. Machine translations of automatically produced interview transcripts may also be used to verify a fixer's⁴ or other amateur interpreter's interpretation.

In summary, the results indicate that respondents commonly use MT for assimilation of foreign-language information as well as for disseminating information, and less commonly in journalistic processes requiring communication. This differs from, for example, Vieira's (2024) study of public service personnel, in which MT was most often used for communication with others. This implies that the nature of different professions can lead to different purposes and ways of using MT.

4.5 Motivations for using MT

In the survey, we inquired about respondents' reasons for using MT. As is shown in Figure 6, they use MT to cover a variety of needs, most commonly for obtaining or ensuring an understanding of foreign-language texts and speeding up the process of using foreign-language sources when writing a news item.

However, responses to the next two statements show more variation. More respondents disagreed or did not take a stand on using MT for locating information in foreign-language texts or tapping into a wider variety of sources in different languages. Our data does not give a definitive explanation for such variation. Possible reasons include limiting the use of MT to the languages one knows or simply not needing to use MT for those pur-

poses. In addition, the low quality of MT in some language pairs may exclude its use in exploring a wider variety of sources, as noted in a response to an open-ended question:

Sometimes we have done a raw machine translation of an interview and used it to select the sections to be sent to a professional translator for precise translation. For example, the machine is so bad at translating Somali that it's practically useless. (110)

Data from the interviews helped form a more nuanced picture of what motivates journalists to employ MT. Increased working speed was named by several people as an essential advantage that MT provides. Being able to work more quickly might be one of the motivations for using MT with English and Swedish, which are well known among respondents (see Section 4.3). In the following quote, interviewee I6 mentions that aside from the main benefit of increased speed, they use MT as an additional verification that they have correctly understood a foreign-language text:

Yeah, [the main benefit] is the reading speed, when you're in a rush and need to write an article based on another article in a foreign language. But otherwise [the benefit] is getting the assurance that you understood it right [...]. (I6)

MT was also used by journalists to verify that they have translated a text correctly or that someone else's translation is accurate. Interviewee I8 explained that after they interview someone in Swedish, they transcribe the interview directly into Finnish, translating in their head while working. If they are not completely sure of the

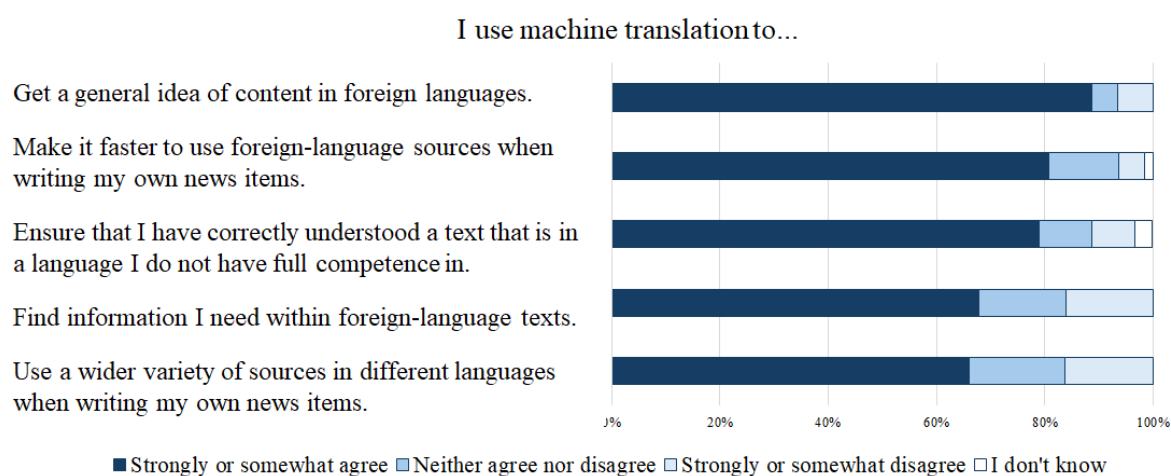


Figure 6. Agreement with statements about motivations for using MT in journalism (Q15), n=62.

⁴ Journalist's local assistant who helps with practical arrangements and may act as an interpreter.

Finnish translation, they might use MT to translate the problematic section of the Swedish text to get a second opinion on their own translation. Interviewee I9 explained how they read an English news item about an event in Russia, then used MT to translate a Russian-language account of the same event so that they could check the veracity of the English news item. A similar account was given by interviewee I3 about checking the reliability of the use of French sources by an English media outlet.

Overall, our study identified a variety of motivations journalists have for employing MT. This in turn highlights how respondents have creatively integrated MT into everyday work processes. The variety may also be an indication that respondents are given independence in selecting working methods, and MT use is usually an individual choice. At least one paper on MT use in public services reported similar results (İlkılıç et al., 2026).

4.6 Risk awareness and verification strategies

The study yielded important insights into journalists' awareness of the risks associated with MT and the variety of strategies they use to manage and mitigate those risks. Several interviewees brought up the Journalist's Guidelines (Council for Mass Media in Finland, n.d.), which define the ethical code of journalists in Finland, and their desire to avoid the risk of violating them. The guidelines require journalists to 'seek truthful information', to check information 'as thoroughly as possible – even if it has been previously published', and to 'keep the identity of the source of confidential information confidential' (ibid.). These guidelines are directly connected to journalistic translation and violating them in the process of using MT would mean taking both communicative and credibility risks. Similar concerns were brought up by journalists in Havumetsä and Nurminen (2025).

Survey respondents displayed a strong awareness of the communicative risk that MT output may not fully correspond to the source text. The statement that 'Machine translation may distort the meaning of the original text' was somewhat or strongly agreed with by 90% of the survey respondents (Q16). Similar views were expressed in the interviews. For instance, interviewee I2 defined the risk of using MT as follows: 'I think the biggest risk would be causing a misunderstanding or a misconception [...]'. More specific concerns of the respondents included the fear that MT may mistranslate domain-specific terminology, fail to

reproduce the nuances of the source text, or produce language that does not conform to target language norms.

We asked respondents directly about their awareness of the data security risks related to the use of MT. The results are displayed in Figure 7.

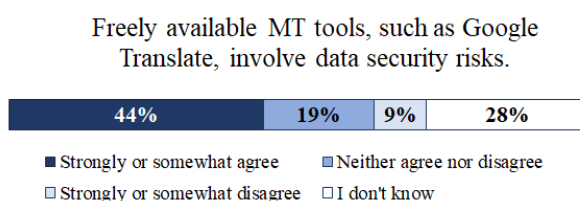


Figure 7. Agreement with the statement, 'Freely available machine translation tools, such as Google Translate, involve data security risks' (Q16), n=68.

While 44% of the respondents agreed with this statement, showing an awareness of risk, as many as 28% answered that they do not know. This might simply be an indication that some journalists do not work with sensitive topics and texts and therefore do not need to consider data security. However, the results do point to uncertainty and a need for guidelines on the data security of open online translation tools. A breach in data security could lead to negative consequences for the media organisation involved, including a potential loss of credibility. To avoid such consequences, some journalists reported not using MT for sensitive texts, such as when working with information received from a source who was promised anonymity.

Yet another kind of risk, that of ineffective interaction, was identified in relation to using automatic speech translation tools when interviewing people. Some survey respondents commented that they would not conduct interviews with these tools because they were not suitable for face-to-face interaction. One respondent explained that 'when I do an interview for a profile piece, machine translation is not as "intimate" as a natural conversation with the interviewee. That is when I avoid it'. The exceptions mentioned were situations in which MT was the only feasible option, such as in conducting street interviews or interviewing Ukrainian refugees. The latter was also given as an example in Nurminen (2023).

Respondents also identified strategies for managing the risks of using MT. These strategies included different methods for verifying the MT output, such as using more than one MT tool to translate a text, translating a text into more than

one target language with MT, consulting linguistically skilled colleagues or dictionaries, and looking for other sources that would corroborate the machine-translated output. The use of English as a target language instead of Finnish also appeared to be a way of reducing the uncertainty connected with MT. Several interviewees told us that they frequently set English as the target language because they consider it to be of better quality than MT into Finnish. To assess whether uncertainty about the quality of the MT was at a tolerable level, situational judgment was used: under tight deadlines it might be acceptable to take a minor risk of incorrect translation if it applies only to a small section of the overall story.

The extent of harm that could be caused by an error in a machine translation was seen as depending on the significance of the piece of news: the more important the news item, the bigger the potential harm. An error in the MT of a more lightweight news item might be regarded as a risk worth taking, considering that an error would not cause great harm and any needed corrections could easily be made online. The general attitude among interviewees was, however, that if errors originating from MT reached the public, the image of the news outlet would suffer and that the taking of too big risks would violate journalistic ethics:

Then if I hit a wall, and depending on how important, let's say, a sentence that I haven't been able to understand is, [...] and if I have to understand it, to translate it correctly for the story to hold, and if I can't do it with the tools I have, then I just won't do the story. It's not a big loss for me.
(19)

This quote from journalist I9 illustrates how important the reliability of a story is to the participants of this study, and also that MT is not yet seen as the answer to all translation problems in the newsroom.

Our analysis indicates that the journalists' evaluation of the reliability of MT was understood as consisting of two dimensions: it must be possible to both assess the semantic similarity between the source text and the MT output, and to establish, on the basis of the MT, that the source text is a trustworthy source of information. The journalists' inability to ensure the reliability of the translation using their own language skills emerged as the most significant factor limiting the use of MT. Other factors constraining the use of MT included the journalists' subject matter knowledge and the

risks they perceived in both MT quality and the translation process. As interviewee I5 put it:

I wouldn't go blindly looking for a story about [my specialty area] in a completely foreign country and context, because then there are so many uncertainties, like, what is this about and who are these people? (I5)

To recap, journalists show evidence of understanding the myriad of risks involved in their use of MT and also employing strategies to mitigate some of the risks. However, further education and guidelines would be needed, as has been called for in several past studies (e.g., O'Brien and Ehrensberger-Dow, 2020; Vieira et al., 2020).

5 Conclusions and further work

In this article we reported the findings of an exploratory study that we conducted in 2023–2024 among Finnish journalists on their use of MT at work. We found that journalists work in highly multilingual environments and that they sometimes turn to MT as a useful tool that speeds up work processes. The most frequently used tools were traditional MT tools such as Google Translate or DeepL, although participants also mentioned that the organisations they work for had started to purchase generative AI tools.

Study participants showed a strong tendency to use MT with languages they had at least a somewhat good command of. The languages translated most often were English and Swedish, which 100% and 78% of the respondents, respectively, reported knowing. The most often mentioned work processes in which MT was used involved gathering information, doing background reading and performing other tasks in which MT was used for assimilation. Employing MT for dissemination was also popular, but respondents showed reluctance to use MT for communication, especially in interviewing contexts.

The fact that the participants used MT to translate languages that the great majority of them knew well confirmed that a major perceived benefit of MT is increased working speed. An even more important benefit of MT was that it enables the gisting of foreign-language texts. MT was also employed to verify the MT user's own interpretation of the source text.

Providing access to a wider range of sources than would be possible without MT and facilitating the identification of information in foreign-

language texts were also frequently identified advantages of using MT. However, the use of MT was limited by the journalists' language skills and contextual knowledge, which provided the necessary basis for verifying the MT output. The requirement to verify the MT output before it can be used in media ruled out using MT to understand sources in languages that are rarely spoken by Finnish journalists.

MT was recognized as posing risks such as distortion of meaning, loss of nuance, compromise of data security, and ineffective interaction. The participants of this study employed several methods for mitigating these risks, including using more than one MT tool to translate the same text; translating a text into several target languages with MT; translating into English instead of Finnish, which they considered as resulting in the best quality; and consulting other sources such as dictionaries or colleagues with language skills. We identified the need for guidelines on MT use among journalists.

The most important limitation to our study was the small size of the sample, with 68 responses to the survey and 10 interviews, and the fact that the study was carried out in only one country. Broad conclusions about the use of MT in journalism cannot therefore be drawn, nor can our results be generalized.

However, as one of the first studies of MT in actual use by journalists, it does serve to reveal previously undiscovered practices and to provide rich descriptions of the role of MT in journalistic processes. As such, it offers an important contribution to the small body of research on the use of MT in journalism, while also contributing to the nascent conceptualisation of paraprofessional translators as MT users.

A final contribution of the article is that it describes a very specific point in time: generative AI tools were developing very rapidly and being introduced in many workplaces, while more popular, traditional MT tools were still fully based on neural MT. Capturing that point in time may prove useful as a benchmark and point of comparison for future studies.

Looking to the future, further studies on journalists' use of MT as well as other AI-based tools are needed. Similar studies could be carried out on a broader scale, and more in-depth studies would also be warranted. Workplace-based studies of the types previously carried out in research on journalistic translation (e.g., Perrin and Ehrensberger-

Dow, 2012; van Rooyen, 2018; Davier, 2019; 2022) could focus specifically on MT use. Further studies could also explore MT use in news agencies.

These studies would help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the use of MT and, ultimately, of the ways in which MT can affect the production of knowledge by journalists. This increased understanding could be used for training journalists and designing MT policies that are based on knowledge about the actual competences and needs of the people in newsrooms.

Acknowledgements:

This research is part of the DECA project funded by the Strategic Research Council (SRC) established within the Research Council of Finland. Funding agreements 372275 (University of Eastern Finland) and 372226 (consortium coordinator University of Helsinki). The authors want to thank Léa Huotari for her collaboration in creating the interview questions.

References

- Bielsa, Esperança, and Susan Bassnett. 2009. *Translation in Global News*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2013. *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. SAGE, Los Angeles.
- Canfora, Carmen, and Angelika Ottmann. 2020. [Risks in Neural Machine Translation](#). *Translation Spaces* 9 (1): 58–77.
- Caswell, Isaac. 2024. [110 new languages are coming to Google Translate](#). The Keyword blog.
- Ciribuco, Andrea. 2020. [Translating the Village: Translation as Part of Everyday Lives of Asylum Seekers in Italy](#). *Translation Spaces*, 9 (2): 179–201.
- Council for Mass Media in Finland. n.d. [Journalist's Guidelines](#). Accessed 18 March 2026.
- Davier, Lucile. 2019. [Technological convergence threatening translation: The professional vision of francophone journalists in Canada](#). In Lucile Davier, and Kyle Conway (eds.), *Journalism and Translation in the Era of Convergence*. Benjamins Translation Library Vol. 146, 177–207. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam and Philadelphia.
- Davier, Lucile. 2021. [Translation in the News Agencies](#). In Esperança Bielsa (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Media*, 183–198. Routledge, London.
- Davier, Lucile. 2022. "People have probably offered to buy me a dictionary 20 times since I've been here": Risk management within a community of journalists in francophone Canada. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, (37): 35–54.
- DeepL. 2024. [DeepL launches next generation LLM that outperforms GPT-4, Google, and Microsoft for translation quality](#). Press release.
- Ehrensberger-Dow, Maureen, Alice Delorme Benites, and Caroline Lehr. 2023. [A New Role for Translators and Trainers: MT Literacy Consultants](#). *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer*, 17 (3): 393–411.
- Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK. 2019. [The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland](#). Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines 2019. Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK publications 3/2019. Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK, Helsinki, Finland.
- Gaspari, Federico. 2007. *The Role of Online MT in Webpage Translation*. Thesis, University of Manchester.
- Gonçalves, Madalena, Marianna Buchicchio, Craig Stewart, Helena Moniz, and Alon Lavie. 2022. [Agent and User-Generated Content and Its Impact on Customer Support MT](#). *Proceedings of EAMT 2022*, 201–210.
- Havumetsä, Nina, and Mary Nurminen. 2025. [\(Kone\)kääntäminen Ylessä ja muunkielisten episteemiset oikeudet](#) [Translation: (Machine) Translation at Finnish Public Broadcaster Yle and the Epistemic Rights of Non-dominant Language Speakers. *Mikael: Finnish Journal of Translation and Interpreting Studies*, 18 (1): 7–22.
- İlkılıç, Sıla, Maarit Koponen, and Mary Nurminen. 2026. Automatic translation in public services: A survey of the Finnish public sector. In Dimitar Shterionov et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 26th Annual Conference of the European Association for Machine Translation*.
- Koponen, Maarit, and Mary Nurminen. 2024. Risk Management for Content Delivery via Raw Machine Translation. In Marion Winters, Sharon Deane-Cox, and Ursula Böser (eds.), *Translation, Interpreting and Technological Change: Innovations in Research, Practice and Training*, 111–135. Bloomsbury, London.
- Koskinen, Kaisa. 2025. [Translating at work: Identifying and contextualizing paraprofessional translatoriality in organizations](#). In Regina Rogl, Daniela Schlager, and Hanna Risku (eds.), *Field Research on Translation and Interpreting*, 34–54. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- Kourouni, Kyriaki, and John O'Shea. 2025. [On the Adoption and Integration of Machine Translation by Lawyers in Greece: Some Insights](#). *Revista Tradumàtica*, 23: 1–20.
- Matsushita, Kayo. 2015. *Risk Management in the Decision-Making Process of English–Japanese News Translation*. PhD thesis. Rikkyo University, Japan.
- Matsushita, Kayo. 2019. [Globalization of the Emerging Media Newsroom: Implications for Translation and International News Flow in the Case of BuzzFeed Japan](#). In Lucile Davier, and Kyle Conway (eds.), *Journalism and Translation in the Era of Convergence*, 135–153. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam.
- Media Metrics Finland. 2023, September 21. [KMT 2023 Lehtien lukijamäärät](#) [National Readership Survey 2023].
- Navarro, Ignasi. 2012. [La postedició de continguts en publicacions diàries](#) [The post-editing of content in daily newspapers]. *Revista Tradumàtica*, 10: 185–191.

- Nieminen, Hannu. 2024. [Why we need epistemic rights](#). In Minna Aslama Horowitz, Hannu Nieminen, Katja Lehtisaari, and Alessandro D'Arma (eds.), *Epistemic Rights in the Era of Digital Disruption*, 11–28. Global Transformations in Media and Communication Research - A Palgrave and IAMCR Series. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.
- Nitzke, Jean, Silvia Hansen-Schirra, and Carmen Canfora. 2019. [Risk Management and Post-Editing Competence](#). *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, (31): 239–259.
- Nurminen, Mary. n.d. [Machine Translation Stories: Real people finding real uses for Google Translate and other MT tools](#).
- Nurminen, Mary. 2020. [Raw Machine Translation Use by Patent Professionals: A Case of Distributed Cognition](#). *Translation, Cognition & Behavior*, 3 (1): 100–121.
- Nurminen, Mary. 2023. [Journalist Nina: “The other choice would have been no interview at all”](#). Machine Translation Stories.
- Nurminen, Mary. 2025. [Machine Translation in Non-Translation Workplaces](#). In Stefan Baumgarten, and Michael Tieber (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Technology and Society*, 423–435. Routledge, Abingdon UK.
- O'Brien, Sharon, and Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow. 2020. “MT Literacy—A Cognitive View.” *Translation, Cognition and Behavior* 3 (2): 143–63. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tcb.00038.obr>.
- Open AI. 2022. [Introducing ChatGPT](#).
- Perrin, Daniel, and Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow. 2012. Translating the news. A globally relevant field for applied linguistics research. In Christina Gitsaki, and Richard Baldauf (eds.), *Future directions in applied linguistics. Local and global perspectives*, 352–372. Cambridge Scholars, Cambridge.
- Perrin, Daniel, and Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow. 2018. [10 Translation in journalism: Local practices in multilingual newsflows](#). In Catherine Chua Siew Kheng (ed.), *Un(intended) Language Planning in a Globalising World: Multiple Levels of Players at Work*, 163–182. De Gruyter Open, Warsaw, Poland.
- Ping, Yuan. 2021. [Towards two decades of journalistic translation research \(2000–2019\): a corpus-based bibliometric study of the Translation Studies Bibliography](#). *Meta*, 66(2): 406–426.
- Reuters, n.d. [Standards and values](#). Accessed 22 April 2026.
- Scammell, Claire, and Esperança Bielsa. 2022. [Cross-cultural engagement through translated news: A reception analysis](#). *Journalism*, 23(7): 1430–1448.
- Secker, Andrew, Julie Wall, Peggy van der Kreeft, and Susie Coleman. 2019. *Global Under-Resourced MEdia Translation (GoURMET): D5.2 – Use Cases and Requirements*.
- Song, Yonsuk. 2020. [Ethics of Journalistic Translation and Its Implications for Machine Translation: A Case Study in the South Korean Context](#). *Babel. Revue Internationale de La Traduction / International Journal of Translation*, 66(4–5): 829–846.
- Toledo-Báez, Cristina, and Luis Carlos Marín Navarro. 2025. [Rage against the AI Machine? Perspectives and Attitudes of Spanish Scholars Outside the Language Services Sector Regarding Neural Machine Translation, Chatbots, and Post-Editing](#). *Revista Tradumàtica*, 23: 217–243.
- Valdeón, Roberto A. 2015. [Fifteen Years of Journalistic Translation Research and More](#). *Perspectives*, 23(4): 634–662.
- Valdeón, Roberto A. 2020. [Journalistic Translation Research Goes Global: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations Five Years On](#). *Perspectives*, 28(3): 325–338.
- Valdez, Susana and Ana Guerberofo-Arenas. 2025. [‘Google Translate is our best friend here’: A vignette-based interview study on machine translation use for health communication](#). *Translation Spaces*, 14(2): 253–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09076760903125051>
- van Rooyen, Marlie. 2018. [Investigating Translation Flows: Community Radio News in South Africa](#). *Across Languages and Cultures*, 19(2): 259–278.
- Vieira, Lucas Nunes, Minako O'Hagan, and Carol O'Sullivan. 2020. [Understanding the Societal Impacts of Machine Translation: A Critical Review of the Literature on Medical and Legal Use Cases](#). *Information, Communication & Society*, 24 (11): 1–18.
- Vieira, Lucas. 2024. [Machine translation and migration](#). Maher, Brigid, Loredana Polezzi and Rita Wilson (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Migration*, 221–233. Routledge, Oxon and New York.
- Watson, Lani. 2018. [Systematic Epistemic Rights Violations in the Media: A Brexit Case Study](#). *Social Epistemology*, 32(2): 88–102.
- Zappatore, Marco, and Gilda Ruggieri. 2024. [Adopting Machine Translation in the Healthcare Sector: A Methodological Multi-Criteria Review](#). *Computer Speech & Language*, 84 (C): 1–46.

Appendix A. Survey questions in English

Machine translation in the work of journalists

Survey questions

1. I have received sufficient information about the study and the related processing of my personal data. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I confirm my participation in this study and agree to be a research subject. You can continue with the survey by answering "yes". *
- Yes

Background information

Mandatory questions are marked with an asterisk (*).

2. How long have you been doing journalistic work? *
 - 0–2 years
 - 3–6 years
 - 7–10 years
 - 11–15 years
 - More than 15 years
3. What is the geographical scope or coverage of the media you represent? If you are a freelancer, refer to the media that you do the most work for. *
 - National
 - Regional
 - Metropolitan area
 - City
 - Other, what?
4. What are the topics you cover the most? You can choose a maximum of three topics. *
 - Foreign news
 - Domestic news
 - Local news
 - Politics and society
 - Economy
 - Culture
 - Sports
 - Science
 - Health and lifestyle
 - Youth and children's news
 - Other, what?

5. Journalists sometimes need to use sources that are written in other languages or interview people who speak other languages. In these situations it is recommended to use...: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree *

Journalist's own language skills *	1	2	3	4	5
Professional translator/interpreter *	1	2	3	4	5
Machine translation *	1	2	3	4	5
Non-professional translator/interpreter *	1	2	3	4	5

Need for and use of foreign languages at work

6. What languages do you know? Mark all of the languages you know well enough that you can read background material for your news item in them: *

Finnish	Spanish	Chinese	Portuguese	Danish
English	Dutch	Kurdish	French	Ukrainian
Swedish	Italian	Norwegian	German	Russian
Arabic	Japanese	Persian, Farsi	Somali	Estonian
Other, what language?				

7. Is there a language you don't know at all, or well enough, that would be helpful to you in your work? *
- No
 - Yes, what language?
 - I don't know
8. How often do you need to use a foreign language or understand something in a foreign language at work? *
- Every day
 - Several times a week
 - Several times a month
 - Less than once a month
9. What kinds of work processes does the need for a foreign language arise in? You can choose more than one answer. *
- When I'm following other media
 - When I'm gathering information and references for a news item
 - When I'm communicating with an interviewee
 - When I'm communicating with colleagues, assistants, fixers, etc.
 - When I'm translating texts or speech to be used in a news item
 - In other situations or work processes, which ones?

Use of machine translation at work

Machine translation refers to applications on mobile devices and computers that automatically translate text or speech from one language to another. Examples of such applications are Google Translate and the translation function of web browsers. Machine translation also includes the use of large language models such as ChatGPT to translate text.

10. In what kinds of work processes do you use machine translation? You can choose more than one answer. *
- When I'm following other media
 - When I'm gathering information and references for a news item
 - When I'm reading foreign-language media to look for news topics

- When I'm communicating with an interviewee
- When I'm communicating with colleagues, assistants, fixers, etc.
- When I'm translating texts or speech to be used in a news item
- Other situation or process. Which one?
- I don't use machine translation. If you choose this option, you will go directly to question 16.

11. What languages have you translated using machine translation during the past year? Mark all the languages you can remember. *

Finnish	Spanish	Chinese	Portuguese	Danish
English	Dutch	Kurdish	French	Ukrainian
Swedish	Italian	Norwegian	German	Russian
Arabic	Japanese	Persian, Farsi	Somali	Estonian
Other, what?				

12. How often do you use machine translation at work? *

- Every day
- Several times a week
- Several times a month
- Less than once a month

13. What machine translation tools do you use at work? Choose a maximum of 3 tools that you use most often. *

- Traditional machine translation tools such as Google Translate or DeepL
- The translation function in an internet browser such as Chrome or Firefox
- The translation function in a social media platform such as Facebook or X
- The translation function in a large language model such as ChatGPT
- A machine translation tool that translates speech

14. Describe in more detail 1–3 of the most important processes in which you have used MT in your work: what journalistic process were you working in and how did you use MT in it?

15. Evaluate the statements below and choose the answer that best describes your **experiences** with machine translation at work. 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree. *

I use machine translation to make it faster to use foreign-language sources when writing my own news items	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
I use machine translation to get a general idea of content in foreign languages	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
I use machine translation to ensure that I have correctly understood a text that is in a language I do not have full competence in.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
I use machine translation to find information I need within foreign-language texts.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
I use machine translation so that I can use a wider variety of sources in different languages when writing my own news items.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know

16. Evaluate the statements below and choose the answer that best describes your **opinions** on machine translation at work: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Somewhat disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Strongly agree. *

With the help of machine translation, journalists can interview people with whom they do not share a language.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Machine translation can distort the meaning of the original text.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Freely available machine translation tools, such as Google Translate, involve data security risks.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
There is a risk that using machine translation can lead to a deterioration of my own language skills.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
It is unethical to use a machine translation that you cannot trust 100%.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
The growing use of machine translation in journalistic work is a good thing.	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know

17. How has your news organization reacted to the use of machine translation tools such as Google Translate in journalistic work? (for example, for translating background material or as a tool for interviewing people)? *

- Machine translation tools are used in journalistic work and we have been given guidance on using them.
- Machine translation tools are used in journalistic work but we have not been given guidance on using them.
- The use of machine translation tools is forbidden.
- As far as I know, machine translation tools are not used in journalistic work, but we have not been given guidance on using them.
- I don't know if anyone in our organization is using machine translation tools in their journalistic work.

18. I could write a news item that is based on a machine-translated text... *

- If I have a good command of the language of the original text.
- If I have at least a somewhat good command of the language of the original text
- Even if I have no command of the language of the original text.
- The level of my language skills does not affect my judgement.
- I would not write a news item based on a machine-translated text.

19. In what situations do you think machine translation should **not** be used?

20. Do you have other comments or experiences with machine translation in journalistic work, or questions you have been thinking about?