

## The four stages of machine translation acceptance in a freelancer's life

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At the beginning of my career some 20 years ago, the reality of a translator was that having too many translation projects delivered per month would earn them a good living. That was true then and it is true now. The only difference is that back then one would have to translate copiously, word after word, to get the job done, while now the job is done with the help of technology which can speed up and streamline the process.

The first step to the “technologization” of the profession was the emergence of Computer Assisted Tools (CATs). I clearly remember that I did not like much the new development because I thought it would disrupt my routine and take me out of my comfort zone. It's thus fair to say that I was not very fond of technology back then. Little did I know that CATs would become my best friends. Luckily, a colleague introduced me to CATs early on and I did not miss the opportunity to take my job to the next level at a time when most translators got stuck in the translation vs technology debate. Ever since then, I never looked back; in fact, I became a technology “follower” since I could clearly see that it was helping me become more productive and thus earn more, but also have a better work-life balance.

When Machine Translation (MT) came along, I remember having the same reaction as I had with CATs. Probably even worse. I really saw an enemy there and for quite some time I refused to take it seriously.

Once again, though, I was lucky, because I met some extraordinary people who had been long involved in language technology and who helped me understand its power and the innumerable opportunities that it brought about. I thus became an early adopter.

Nowadays, I regularly use MT in my everyday work; my output is doubled and in many cases tripled, and I feel exactly as I used to after I regularly used CATs in the past.

Unfortunately, most translators are not like me. On the contrary, they still approach language technology with caution or even fear. Mainly because they don't understand it. I came to this conclusion following several surveys that I carried out on different occasions about the relationship between translators and technology. More specifically, a survey aiming to understand the use of CATs and MT by translators was carried out in Greece in 2018 and the responses revealed that age is definitely an issue when it comes to the use of technology. Neither younger colleagues nor the most experienced ones seem to use technology. The most striking feature that came out from those surveys, however, is that it is extremely difficult to establish a “freelance translator persona” due to different academic backgrounds, fields of study, experience in other sectors as well as mere demographics.

Surveys have served as a basis to observe the behavior of translators towards technology and led me to identify four stages to the acceptance of translation technology:

### **Stage 1**

Nescience: I don't know about it therefore it does not exist

### **Stage 2**

Contempt: I loathe it and/or make fun of it; machine translation is stealing my job

### **Stage 3**

Reluctant adoption and shame: I secretly use it

### **Stage 4**

Acceptance: I get to know it and use it; it changes my professional perspective I wonder why it took me so long.

This conclusion is particularly important for several reasons. If MT developers wish to render their products marketable and widely accepted not only by LSPs, but also by the greater translation community, they need to take these stages into account and help translators move from one stage to the next more quickly and more smoothly. In addition, knowledge of these stages is particularly important for the training of translators and their continuous professional development.