Multilingual communication in a researcher's work
Preliminary results of a questionnaire survey

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Abstract

This article presents the preliminary results of a questionnaire survey conducted at the University of Eastern Finland in the first half of 2020. The aim of the survey was to investigate the multiple ways in which multilingual communication and various translatorial activities are included in a researcher's daily work in different disciplines. The phenomenon discussed in this text is called *research translatoriality*, where the term translatoriality emphasizes the fluid and versatile nature of translatorial practices that are present in research contexts, extend beyond translation proper, and are performed by various agents. The survey results emphasize the role of English as the dominant language of academic discourse, but the full variety of languages present in researchers' work at UEF is much wider. Moreover, some kind of translation or interpreting seem to take place at all phases of the research process. Interestingly enough, most researchers do translating, interpreting or proofreading themselves, although many of them have no training for these tasks. Only a minority use the services of language professionals.

Keywords: multilingual communication, non-professional translation, questionnaire survey, research translatoriality, scientific translation

1 Introduction

Research work typically involves many languages, even if researchers are not necessarily conscious of this aspect of their work. Researchers may use research data or reference literature in various languages. Also, the communities in which researchers conduct their work and the audiences with whom they communicate often involve different languages. This means that a researcher's work is in many ways multilingual – and it has probably become even more so over the past decades because of the increasing internationalization and globalization. Typically, where there co-occur many languages, there also exists translation in one form or another, done by either the producer or the recipient of the message – or both – and this is what we are interested in here.

In this article, we concentrate on the multilingual communication included in a researcher's work. This is an area that we find is underresearched and for some of its aspects even unrecognized so far – maybe it is because the activity is so essentially integrated into a researcher's everyday work that it easily escapes the eye of anyone who does

not pay particular attention to it. Indeed, it is one of the aims of this work in progress to identify and describe the multifarious nature of multilingual communication involved in academic research and pay due attention to the phenomenon. In this article, we present the preliminary results of this project, but a more detailed analysis is expected in the future.

The article is structured as follows. In section 2, we define our research topic and discuss its nature at a more general level. In section 3, we introduce the rationale behind the present project and give the background information on our data. The bulk of this article is included in section 4, where we discuss the main results of our survey divided into a few specific themes. Section 5 concludes the article with a review of the results, a few critical remarks, and ideas for future research.

2 Translatorial nature of multilingual communication in research contexts

This article concentrates on the translatorial part of a researcher's work where meaning is conveyed between at least two languages. The term we have chosen to use for this phenomenon is **research translatoriality**, by which we refer to any kind of communicative activity that involves meaning transfer between more than one language in research work. It can be written or spoken, and it can be done by the researchers themselves or by someone else – often in co-operation with the researcher. Moreover, research translatoriality can take place at any phase of the research process. It covers the actual empirical process from data collection to the reporting of the research results, as discussed in Esa Penttilä *et al*. (2020), but it may already be present at the initial planning stages when the project is being developed or continue till after the project has finished and its impact is being communicated to the funders. Part of research translatoriality obviously covers translation and interpreting in the traditional sense and is done by language professionals, but the concept extends wider and takes forms that cannot be regarded as prototypical acts of translation or interpreting (about prototypical translation, see e.g. Halverson 2000; Tirkkonen-Condit 2011).

By choosing the term research translatoriality for our topic, we want to emphasize that the phenomenon is clearly wider than what is usually understood by translation. In this, we follow Kaisa Koskinen (2020: 234–235), who points out how the term translation is – partly based on our everyday experience – typically conceptualized in a fairly restricted sense referring to, for example, full literary texts and professional activities. Translatoriality, on the other hand, is free from such everyday meanings and can therefore be more easily conceptualized as a continuum that covers various activities of multilingual language transfer. At one end of this continuum, we can place traditional translation and interpreting done by language professionals and at the other end more fragmentary, transient, playful and coincidental situations of translanguaging that may take various forms and be done by different actors (about everyday translatoriality, see Kolehmainen *et al*. 2015).

As far as we know, research translatoriality as such has been studied very little until now. There are ample studies that deal with various aspect of translation in research con-

text, but they typically view the topic from a somewhat different – and narrower – perspective. Quite naturally, previous studies on research translation have concentrated on professional translation and often dealt with detailed problems encountered in research contexts. This means that a large part of the phenomenon has so far been left untackled. In translation studies, scientific translation in general was an area that for a long time remained largely neglected – especially in Anglophone contexts (Olohan 2018: 508). Moreover, much of the literature concerning scientific translation has consisted of guides that are for practicians in the field, often concentrating on special genres (Olohan 2009: 247). Actual research on scientific translation has largely dealt with the history of scientific knowledge transfer through translation and, in more recent years, on the dominating role of English in science communication and the effects it has on academic discourse (Olohan 2018: 509; see also Olohan 2012; Paloposki & Riikonen 2013; Bennett 2007, 2010, 2013; Bocanegra-Valle 2014; House 2008). Outside translation studies, research-related translation has raised interest especially in the fields of anthropology, psychology, medicine, and nursing and health sciences, where the discussion has concentrated on the various aspects of multilingual communication that affect the research process. The topics discussed include, among others, translating research instruments for multilingual contexts (Banville *et al*. 2000; Sperber 2004; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat 2011; Chan & So 2017), using interpreters in qualitative research (Edwards 1998; Temple & Edwards 2002; Temple & Young 2004), and self-translation in research context (Pisanski Peterlin 2019). In spite of interest directed at the various aspects of translation in research context, we have not yet found studies that would discuss research translatoriality in a more general sense, and this is where this project finds its niche.

Research translatoriality as a phenomenon extends to various areas of research that are of interest in translation studies, but here we would particularly want to mention two: non-professional translation and interpreting (NPIT) and cognitive translation studies (CTS). Some of the issues discussed in NPIT and CTS overlap with questions that are linked to research translatoriality to such an extent that by combining these three perspectives one could gain insight into the rich multiplicity of multilingual communication and increase awareness of the rich variety of translatorial phenomena that have partly been neglected before.

During the last decade or so, NPIT has concentrated on previously unresearched topics such as fansubbing, interpreting in crisis situations, and child language brokering (Antonini *et al*. 2017: 2–3). The actors in these studies are typically people with no training or professional status in neither translation nor interpreting, and this is where their situation overlaps at least partly with research translatoriality. Although much of research translation and interpreting is done by trained language professionals, our study shows that there are various translatorial tasks that are conducted by researchers themselves – or by their colleagues who happen to be fluent enough in the relevant languages. Typically, these people are not language professionals and have no training in translation or interpreting, as is the case with most NPIT agents. However, while NPIT agents usually translate and interpret voluntarily and without pay, researchers normally do it as part of their salaried profession. In fact, in the present world translation is something that is expected of researchers as one of their basic qualifications. This is especially true, if they are non-

native speakers of English; English dominates academic communication in most fields, and it is basically a prerequisite that researchers are able to translate at least between English and their native tongue (Bennett 2013; Bocanegra-Valle 2014). In this sense, researchers can be viewed as semiprofessionals, or paraprofessionals, rather than pure non-professionals; translation and interpreting is part of their everyday work, just as it is for many journalists.

While researchers are no doubt experts in their respective fields, expertise can also be found among NPIT agents. For example, fan translators are enthusiasts who typically have expert knowledge of the sub-culture they idolize. Therefore, they may even be able to produce translations that exceed the quality of those done by professionals – at least, in some cases. All in all, professionalism and expertise clearly are notions that interact and overlap interestingly within the areas of NPIT, CTS, and research translatoriality. In this sense, analyzing research translatoriality interestingly contributes, not only to NPIT research, but also to the discussion on expertise vs. professionalism that has been going on among CTS scholars since the 1990s (see e.g. Jääskeläinen 2010; Shreve *et al*. 2018).

Although we have above combined research translatoriality especially with NPIT, it must be remembered that there are trained translators, interpreters and language professionals who also participate in the multilingual communication in research contexts, and we do not want to leave them out of the discussion either. On the contrary, we want to investigate the phenomenon as a whole. This is the only way to get as vivid a picture as possible of the whole phenomenon of research translatoriality. However, in addition to the professionals who have been studied to some extent already, we also want to find those **hidden populations** that are easily marginalized and neglected when research concentrates on professional performers only (Lomeña Galiano 2020). The next section will expand on this idea and give the background information on our project.

3 Background of the project

This research project was initiated by the ideas we developed when we were jointly organizing a course on translation issues for doctoral students at the University of Eastern Finland (UEF). The course was called *Translating research material*, and it was originally meant for PhD students in humanities and social sciences who deal with data from various languages. We thought that these PhD students would benefit from basic knowledge about translation and interpreting, which would make them better prepared for various (often unacknowledged) problems that their multilingual research context contains – and might positively affect their analyses as well. Before the course was launched, we thought that the phenomenon only concerns a limited group of PhD candidates who deal with particular topics. How little did we know.

The doctoral course has now been organized once a year in four consecutive years (2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021). Each time, we have collected data from the participants about their translatorial needs and have learned that the context in which they deal with many languages and are involved in translatorial activities vary widely and penetrate the whole research process. Some of the results based on this data have been reported in

Penttilä *et al*. (2020). While analyzing this data, our eyes were opened to the extent of the phenomenon. Research translatoriality does not only concern scholars who need to translate extracts from their data for publication purposes, but it is part of most researcher's practical daily work. Possible exceptions could include monolingual English researchers who only use English data, work in monolingual English environments and publish in English, but this is rare – especially in countries where English is not an official language (about epistemicide and the hegemony of English in science, see e.g. Ammon 2001; Bennett 2007, 2013).

After we had learned about the various translatorial activities in the context of PhD researchers, we wanted to extend our scope and study the phenomenon within the research community at large. As the first step toward this goal, we devised a questionnaire survey that was directed to all researchers at UEF independent of their field or phase of career. Its first results are discussed in this article.

3.1 Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire survey was conducted at UEF in the spring and early summer of 2020, but its development began c. six months earlier – on the basis of our prior experiences with the PhD course mentioned above. The preliminary version of the questionnaire was devised in autumn 2019 and distributed to our colleagues in translation studies at UEF with whom we discussed it at a seminar in early December. On the basis of the comments we received, and are very grateful for, we revised the questionnaire and uploaded it to the eLomake system for piloting – at the time, this was the recommended system for online surveys at UEF. The pilot version was answered by five researchers from different disciplines by mid-January 2020, after which we finalized the electronic form and translated it into English. So, the final version existed both in English and Finnish.

The survey was divided under the following themes: 1) the languages the respondents know and use in their everyday life and work; 2) the various multilingual situations the respondents encounter in the different phases of their work; 3) the forms that translation, interpreting, and language checking take in the respondents' work; 4) the way professional translation services are organized in the respondents' research unit; and 5) the respondents' awareness of the various multilingual communication issues related to research. For each theme, there were several closed questions, most of which were accompanied by open questions where the participants could specify their answers in more detail.

Since the survey was aimed at real people, the ethical issues and the data protection issues were carefully considered during the process. Before answering the questionnaire, the participants were all informed about the purpose and voluntary nature of the survey as well as their right to withdraw from it at any stage. They had to give an informed consent before proceeding further with the questionnaire. The questions were answered anonymously, and no personal data was collected. The data itself is processed confidentially. It is saved on a cloud server protected by a username and a password, and only the

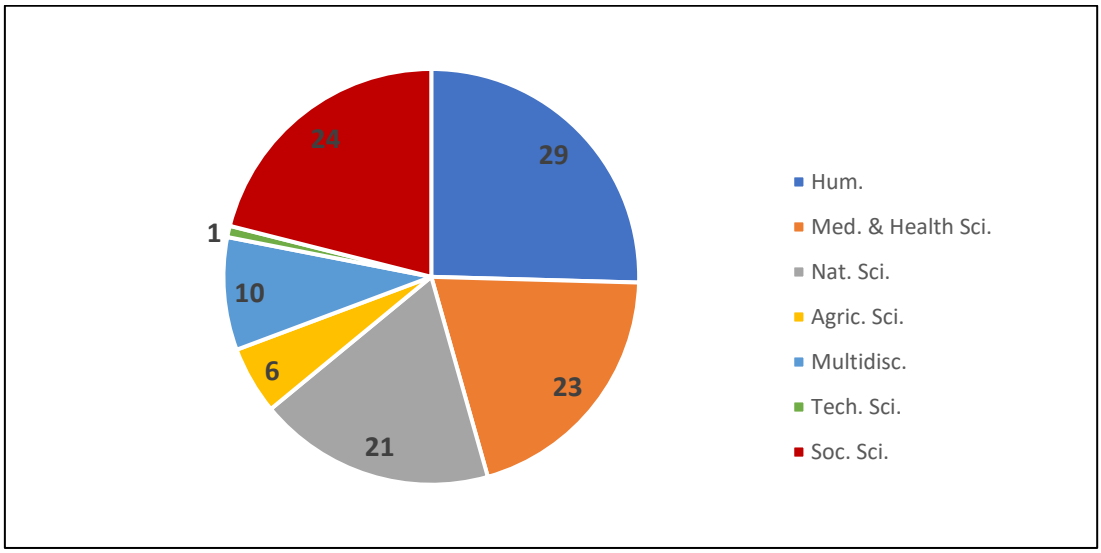
researchers have access to it. When the results are reported, it is ensured that no individuals can be identified.

3.2 Participants

The first participants who answered the questionnaire were the PhD students who participated in the Translating research material course in February 2020. After this, the idea was to circulate the survey to the whole research community at UEF in March–April 2020, but the global pandemic changed the timetable, and it was not until May 2020 when the survey was finally posted to potential participants on a larger scale. The survey was advertised as widely as possible on the university network in May and June 2020, and the last answers we received for it were submitted on 30 June, 2020.

The final number of participants that responded to the questionnaire amounts to 114. Although this is a fair number as such, it only covers a fraction of possible informants. The number of researchers at UEF in June 2020 (including employed teachers and researchers, grant researchers, and those with an emerita/emeritus contract) amounted to 1,800 people. In addition, there were 1,682 PhD students without funding enrolled at UEF in the spring term 2020. These figures partly overlap and not everyone included in them is actively doing research, but still this shows that our survey only reached a minority of potential informants. Luckily, the ones who answered represented the different research fields available at UEF, and therefore their answers offer us a preliminary glimpse into the phenomenon within the research spectrum of the whole university. The distribution of participants with respect to their research field can been seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of participants in each discipline (n=114)

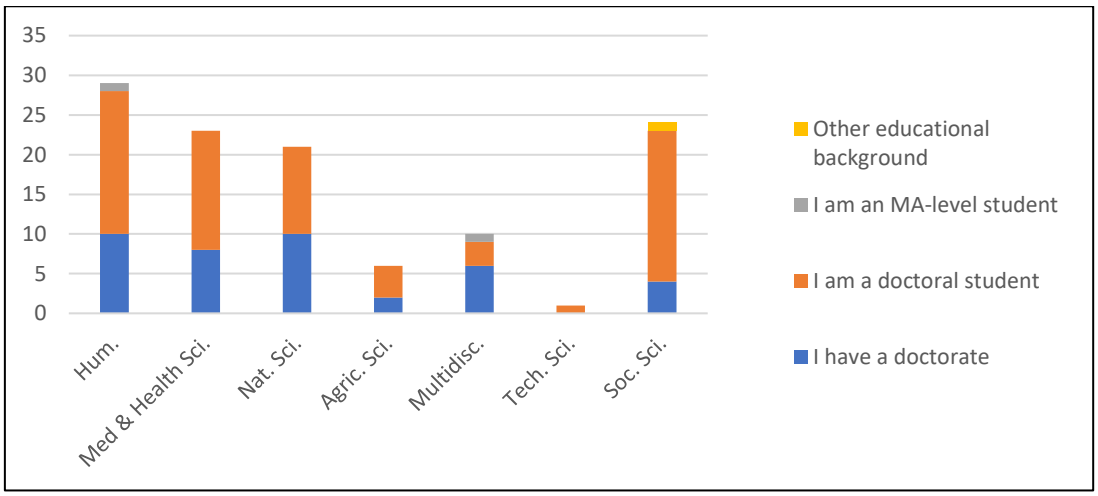


As Figure 1 shows, the biggest participant group comes from the humanities (25%), but social sciences (21%), medical and health sciences (20%), and natural sciences (18%) are almost equally well represented. Only six participants (5%) come from agricultural

sciences, but proportionally that corresponds to the size of the School of Forestry when it is compared to the size of the other disciplines at UEF. As many as 10 participants (9%) listed more than one research field (with varying combinations), and they are all regarded here as multidisciplinary. Since UEF does not have technical sciences in its repertoire, it is natural that there were only few participants classified in this field. In addition to the one shown in figure 1, two multidisciplinary informants listed technical sciences among their special fields.

In terms of their career, the respondents represent different stages, but PhD students were clearly the biggest group (62%). Especially in the social sciences, the proportion of PhD students among the participants was particularly high (83%). On the other hand, in natural sciences the doctoral students and more senior researchers were almost evenly distributed: 48% of the natural sciences respondents were at their postdoctoral or senior level, while the rest were working on their PhD. The number of participants with respect to their career phase in each field of research can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of participants at each career stage per discipline (n=114)



All in all, 40 (35%) participants in our data had completed their research training and received their doctoral degree. Half of them were early-stage researchers and had received their doctorate within the last ten years, but six respondents had completed their PhD already in the 1990s, and the oldest degree was from 1982. Two participants were still doing their MA studies and one had a degree from a university of applied sciences.

4 Preliminary results

This chapter presents the main results of the survey at a general level. We provide an overview of the results and make observations about the more general trends but leave a more detailed analysis for future study. This means that we will not, for example, compare the results between different disciplines or career stages, nor go into detail about any individual respondent profiles, but concentrate on the general picture arising from the

responses. It must be remembered that the number of respondents in each discipline is still relatively low, so the reliability of, for example, field-related results would be somewhat questionable anyway. The discussion in the following section will follow the order in which the themes were presented in the actual online questionnaire. Most of the discussion is based on answers given to the closed questions, but some points are illustrated with comments picked up from the open ones.

The questionnaire aimed to find out about research translatoriality as extensively as possible, so the participants were asked to view translation and interpreting with an open mind. The instructions in the questionnaire gave the following definition: "In this context translation has been defined broadly to include all types of written or oral communication where different languages are involved; not just translation or interpreting from one language to another." Then the instructions listed a few less ordinary examples of translation, such as "reading a text in one language and making notes in another language", "using machine translation to understand a text written in a foreign language", or "writing a research report in a language that is not your first language or work language". After this, it was pointed out that these are just some examples and that numerous other situations could also be understood as translation. In this way, the participants were asked to think of translation in a very broad sense when answering the questions. The instructions were visible on each page of the questionnaire form.

4.1 Language background and use in everyday life

First, we wanted to form an overview of the overall linguistic resources of our participants. So, we asked them to list their mother tongue(s) and all the other languages they use outside work. Of the 114 participants, the vast majority (94%) reported having only one mother tongue; three participants named two and one participant three mother tongues. Since the questionnaire was distributed at a Finnish university, it is not surprising that the most mentioned mother tongue was Finnish (73%). English was reported by 5% and Russian and German by 4%. The number of other, less often mentioned languages is 18, including various European, African and Asian languages.

The questions about the everyday use of different languages outside work were concerned with each mode of language use separately. The answers clearly demonstrate that the actual life of the most participants is multilingual; only 5% of the respondents reported using only one language (either English or Finnish). The modes of use, however, differed from each other to some extent: 23 languages were used for writing, 29 for speaking, 23 for reading, and 30 for listening. The total number of languages listed in these questions is 38, so the variety of languages is wider than that of mother tongues. The two most frequently used languages are English (mentioned in at least one mode of use by 92%) and Finnish (mentioned by 83%). Other languages that stand out to some degree are Swedish (25%), German (13%), Russian (11%), and Spanish (11%). Next, we will move on to examine the use of languages in the recipients' work.

4.2 Language use in research work

The variety of languages that researchers use in their work is presented in Table 1, which shows how many participants mentioned each language (how much they used the languages, however, was not asked in the questionnaire). The number of languages listed is 28, which is less than the number of languages used in everyday life but more than that of mother tongues. Interestingly, the participants refer to several languages that are not in their everyday linguistic repertoire. In research, the role of English is emphasized: all participants read text in English and 95% of them write or speak it. Only six participants do not write in English at all. The share of participants working in Finnish is considerable as well: 65% report using Finnish in writing and 82% in speaking. The other languages fall far behind English and Finnish with French, German, Russian, Spanish and Swedish as the most prominent ones.

Table 1: Use of languages in researchers' work (n=114)

Language	Writing	Speaking	Reading	Listening
Amharic				1
Arabic				2
Bangla				1
Catalan			1	
Chinese			1	
Church Slavonic	1		1	1
Danish			2	1
English	108	108	114	109
Estonian	1	1	1	1
Finnish	74	93	81	92
French	1	2	10	3
German	4	3	18	6
Greek		1	2	1
Hebrew				1
Indonesian			1	1
Italian		1	2	1
Japanese			1	
Karelian		1		1
Latin			1	
Norwegian		1	2	
Portuguese	1		3	1
Romanian		1	1	1
Russian	6	9	11	9
Sami			1	1
Serbian		1		
Skolt Sami			1	1
Spanish	1	4	10	5
Swedish	3	9	30	15

So, as Table 1 shows, English clearly dominates in research work, as could be expected. However, Finnish and, to a lesser extent, Swedish – the other national language in Finland

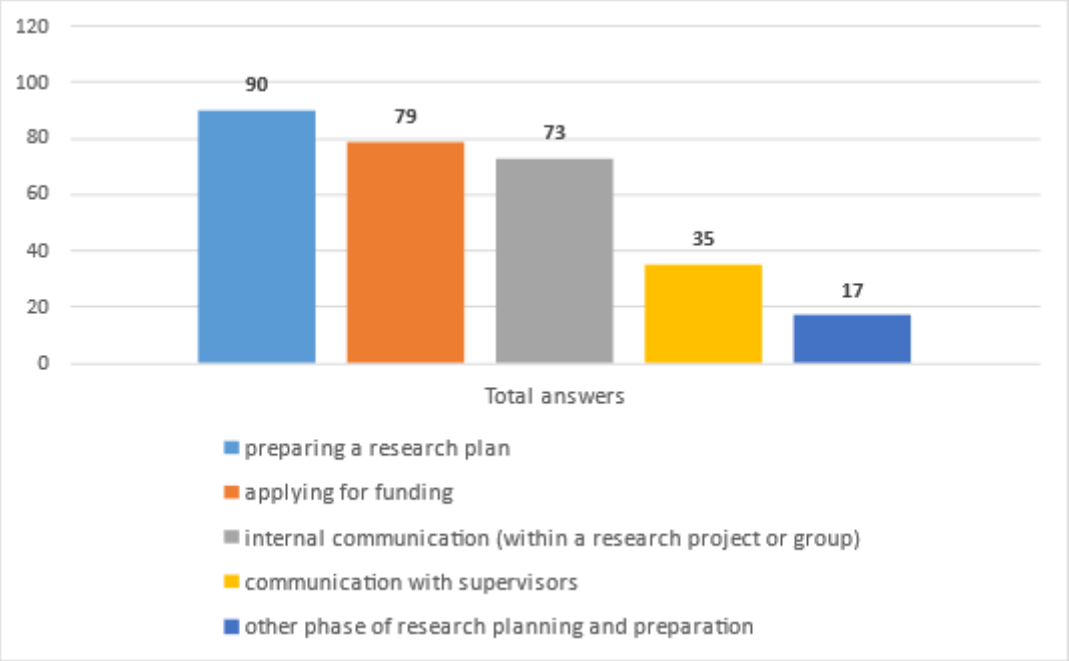
– seem to be relevant languages in scientific contexts for many of our participants. All in all, there is quite a variety of languages used by the respondents, which illustrates the multilingual nature of research work. In the following section, we will look more closely into the role of multiple languages at different phases of research.

4.3 Languages at different phases of research

Since we wanted to explore the scope of research translatoriality among our subjects, we asked them whether and how they had encountered multilingualism at different stages of their research process. In this question, the process was defined widely and divided into the following five stages: a) research preparation and administration, b) using research literature, c) gathering research data, d) analyzing research material, and e) reporting on research. Each of the categories included several subcategories of multiple-choice questions, and in each case the participants could choose more than one answer. They could further elaborate on their answers in the open questions in each subcategory.

With respect to research preparation and administration, the participants replied that they encounter multilingual matters most often when preparing a research plan (79%), when applying for funding (69%), or when communicating with their colleagues within the research group or project (64%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Number of participants who use multiple (or foreign) languages in research preparation and administration (n=114)



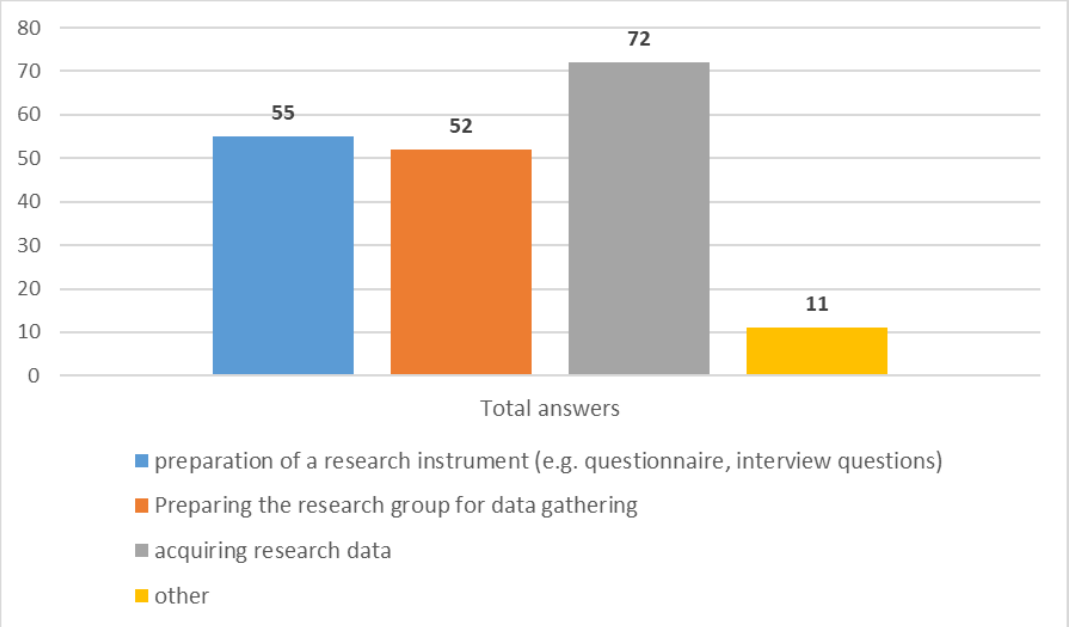
A considerable amount also mentioned communication with supervisors (31%), which is an alternative that only PhD students are likely to choose. Other phases of research planning and preparation, such as communicating with collaborators or supervisors,

received clearly fewer answers (15%). In their further comments, some participants explained that in their multilingual work environment English is used as the language of communication as well as publication. Some also noted that they might write their research plan in English, but translate it into Finnish when applying for funding from Finnish sources, or that their research project is written in English, but the spoken communication amongst the group takes place in Finnish.

When asked about the stage of the research process where they deal with research literature, the participants answered that they use foreign language(s) most often when reading previous research on the topic (91%) or when reading theoretical literature (88%). On the other hand, 23% of the participants answered that they use foreign language(s) in some other phases where they exploited research literature; these included enquiries about different methodological issues or the preliminary phase when they were searching for relevant literature. All in all, it could be difficult to draw a line between theoretical literature and research literature (or even methodological literature), and therefore the answers in this section most likely overlap with each other to quite an extent. Several participants clarified that in their field research literature is mainly – or even completely – in English. Other languages were also mentioned in connection with research literature, but their role appeared much smaller.

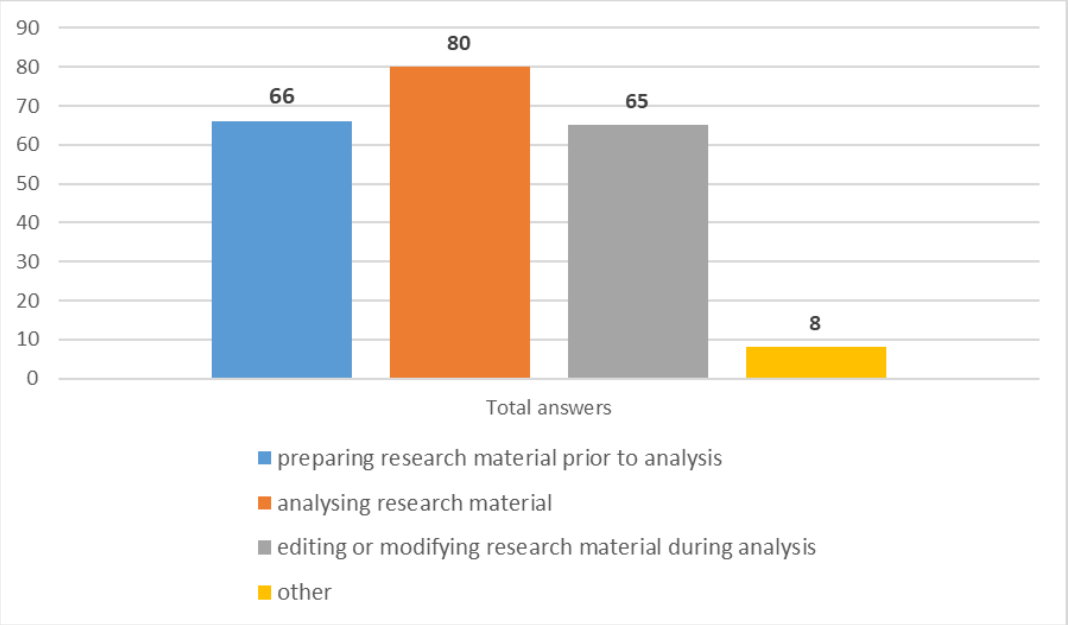
The third stage of the research process that was asked about in the questionnaire was data gathering. The participants answered that foreign language(s) are most often involved when they are acquiring research data (63%). Preparation of a research instrument (such as a questionnaire or an interview) was mentioned by 48% of the participants and preparing the research group for data gathering by 46% of the participants (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of participants who use multiple (or foreign) languages when gathering research data (n=114)



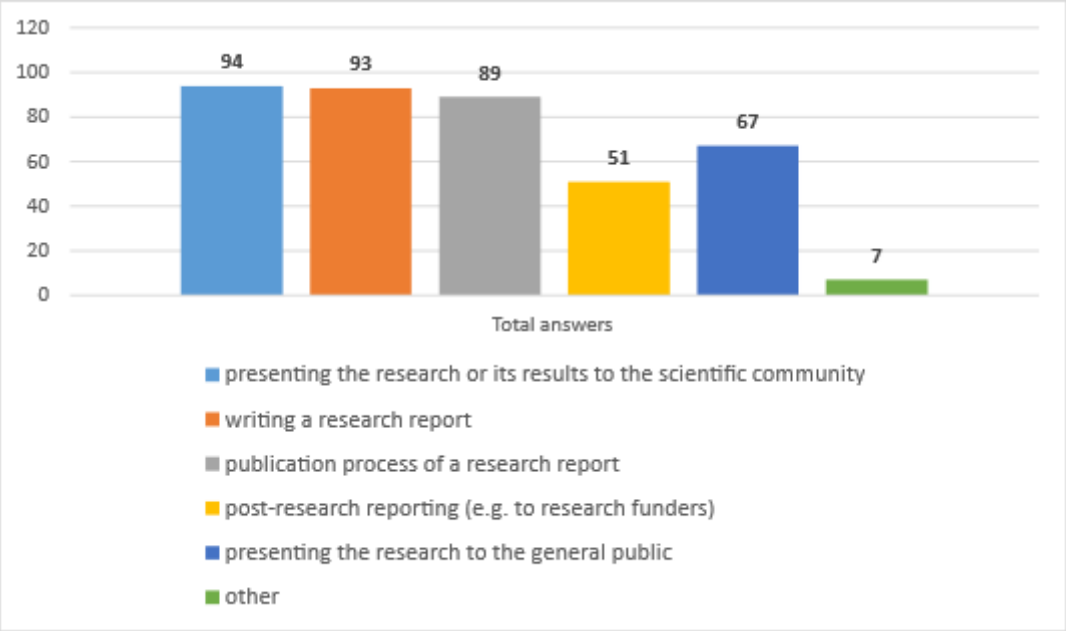
With respect to data analysis stage, the participants replied that multilingual matters are most often present when they are conducting the actual analysis of their data (70%), when they are preparing their data prior to analysis (58%), or when they are editing or modifying their data during the analysis (57%) (see Figure 5). In the open questions, several participants mentioned that their data is in another language and therefore needs to be translated into English for publication purposes, while for others their data is in English and all reporting takes place in English as well.

Figure 5: Number of participants who use multiple (or foreign) languages when analyzing research material (n=114)



The fifth stage of the research process that was addressed in our questionnaire was the reporting phase. The participants responded that this stage involves translation and other multilingual matters in multiple instances. These include presenting the research or its results to the scientific community (83%), writing a research report (82%), the publication process of a research report (78%), post-research reporting (such as writing reports to research funders) (45%), and presenting the research to the general public (59%) (see Figure 6). Most of the participants elaborated that the language of their research articles, conference presentations, and other such reporting is English.

Figure 6: Number of participants who use multiple (or foreign) languages when reporting on their research (n=114)



As the results above show, multilingual communication is strongly present in the different phases of research work. However, it must be pointed out that not all participants answered each question. As regards the first stage (research preparation and administration), ten respondents did not choose any of the listed alternatives; in the second stage (research literature), there were nine such respondents. The third stage (gathering research data) and fourth stage (analysis of research material) had the highest number of no responses – 28 and 23, respectively. The final stage (research reporting) gathered no answers from six respondents. Some of the participants elaborated that there are no other languages involved in these stages except English: all their literature and data is in English, and their reporting takes place in English as well.

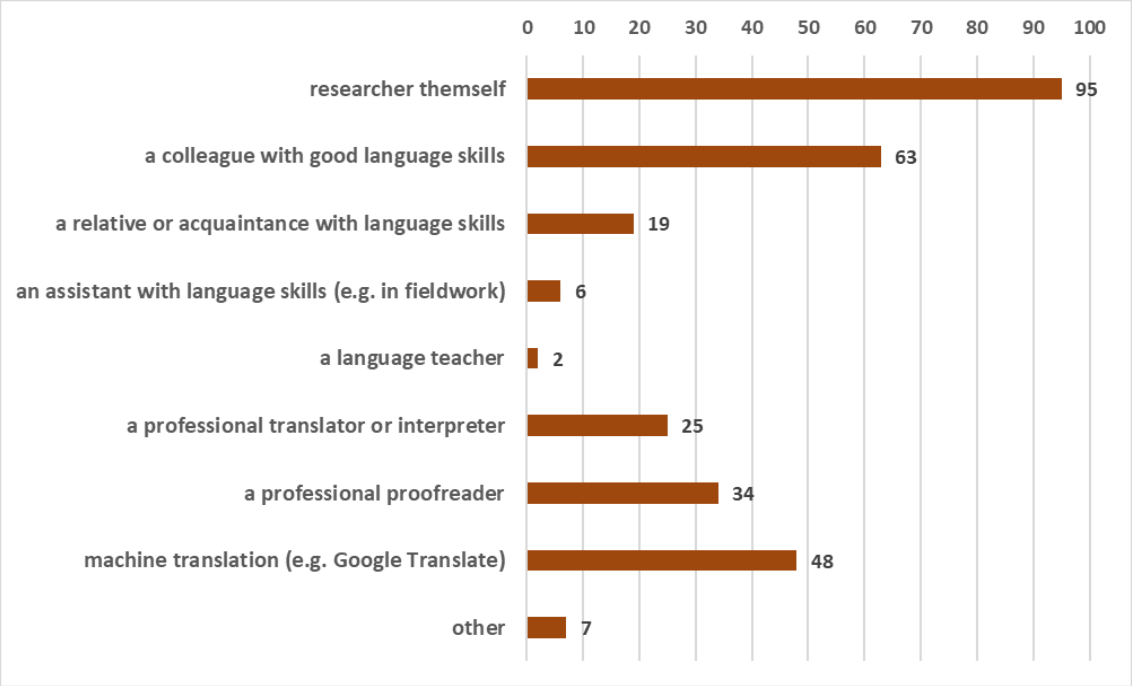
4.4 Distribution of translatorial work and its institutional organization

In the fifth section of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to specify whether translating, interpreting, or proofreading is included in their work, and, if it is, who does it and how it is compensated. Most of the participants answered that their work involves translation (81%), and for quite a few this also applies to interpreting (38%). A clear majority regarded proofreading as part of their work as well (75%). Only 10% did not list any of these translatorial tasks as part of their work.

When asked in more detail about who performs translating, interpreting, and/or proofreading in their work, most answered "researcher themself" (83%), or "a colleague with language skills" (55%) (see Figure 7). Also, the options "a relative or acquaintance with language skills" (17%), "an assistant with language skills (e.g. in fieldwork)" (5%), or "a

language teacher" (2%) were chosen. Perhaps surprisingly, only 22% of the respondents indicated that they use a professional translator/interpreter, and 30% use a professional proofreader. Machine translation (e.g. Google Translate) and other help (6%), such as their supervisor, was also used for translation.

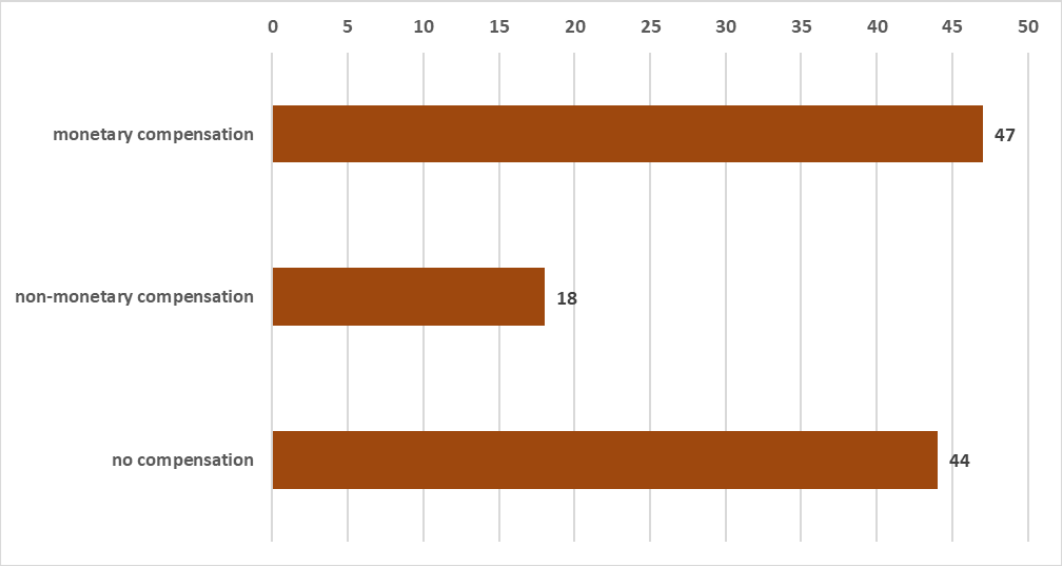
Figure 7: Number of participants involved in translating, interpreting, and/or proofreading in research work (n=114)



The most frequent answer when asked about compensation for translation and proofreading was "monetary compensation" (41%). However, nearly as many chose "no compensation" (39%) (see Figure 8). Quite a few also mentioned "non-monetary compensation" (16%). When elaborating on either "no compensation" or "non-monetary compensation", many pointed out returning favours with favours, such as reciprocal translation work or buying a lunch.

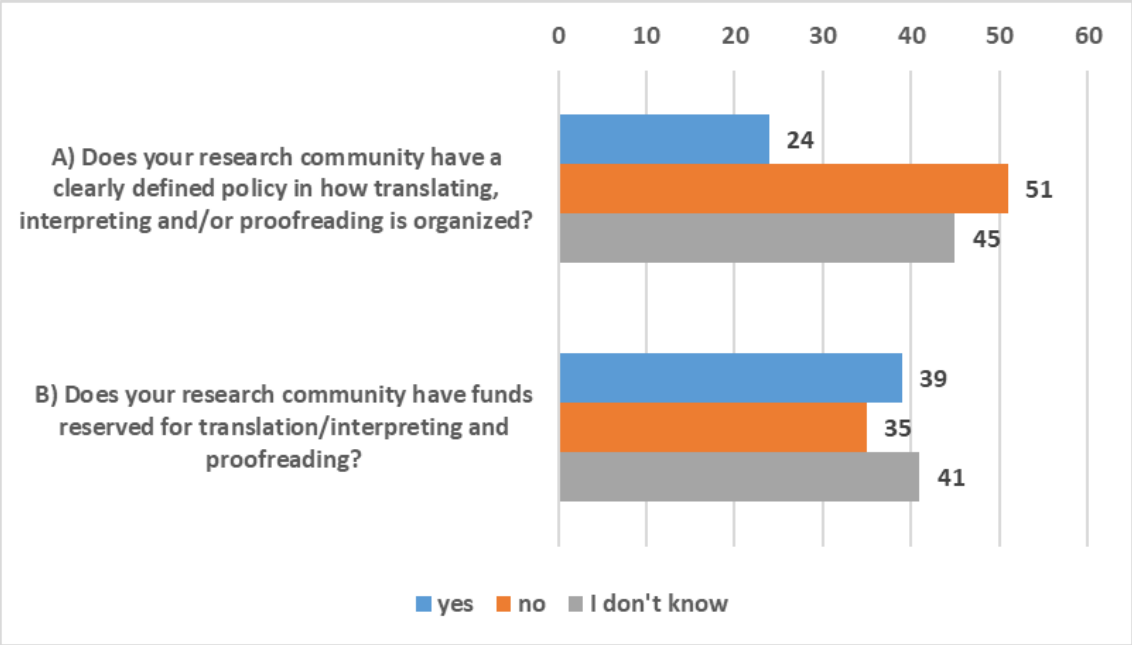
Some participants commented that they consider translating and/or proofreading as a normal part of researcher's work. For instance, a respondent from social sciences commented that "[translation] is part of researcher's work description, at least in my field", and another from health sciences wrote that "I have imagined that operating in English is inherent to my field, and everyone involved should know [English] at least passably" (translated from Finnish by the authors). This corresponds to the answers given to our question about whether the respondents would be interested in participating in training on translation or interpreting, if it were offered. As many as 61% responded "yes", while 37% responded "no". Although the majority would be interested in training, the number of "nos" imply that at least some consider working in more than one language as a part of their routine work.

Figure 8: Number of participants for each option of translatorial task compensation (n=114)



We also asked how translation, interpreting, and proofreading were arranged in the participants' departments (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Organization of professional translation, interpreting, and proofreading in research communities (the graphs show the number of answers given for each option, n=114)



Most responded that there were no common guidelines (45%) or that they did not know of any (40%). Some pointed out that there were clear arrangements for proofreading, but

not for translation or interpreting – at least to their knowledge. When asked whether their research community had funds for translation, interpreting, and proofreading, the answers were evenly distributed: 34% replied "yes", 31% "no", and 36% were unsure. Considering the dominant role of English in publishing and the fact that most participants (73%) reported Finnish as their mother tongue, the respondents' awareness of their unit's arrangements for language services seems rather low.

4.5 Awareness of translatorial issues

In the final section of our questionnaire, the participants were asked about their awareness of multilingual matters in their research work. Most agreed that they had thought about multilingual communication in their work, either together with their colleagues (57%) or by themselves (59%). The share of participants who claimed they had not thought much about such matters was 18%. The majority replied that they had encountered some problems with multilingual communication in their work (66%) as opposed to those who claimed they had not (35%). When asked about the nature of problems they had encountered, many were hesitant about what would count as a problem. A common problem mentioned was the lack of shared language skills between the researcher and the other people involved in the project (including participants, other researchers, and university staff). The risk of misunderstanding was mentioned in several cases. Using English as a common language, when everyone did not share similar skills in the language, was viewed as problematic. Some also mentioned that good translators and interpreters were hard to find for their research.

5 Conclusion

As this study shows, the phenomenon of research translatoriality extends to basically all areas and fields of research work. Translatorial tasks seem to be an essential part of most researchers' work. Moreover, most researchers seem to be doing these tasks as part of their everyday work, and only a minority seems to use the services of professional translation and language experts. Of course, the role of English is essential, and English is included in all our respondents' work in one way or another. Still, the variety of languages involved in research contexts is fairly impressive and shows that – depending on the topic and the researcher's background – the combination of languages used at research work can vary widely.

Since the survey was conducted at a Finnish university, the role of Finnish is also significant, maybe even more significant than one would expect on the basis of the discussion on the dominating role of English in the academia (see e.g. Ammon 2001; Bennett 2007, 2013). It is quite likely that in this respect there are differences between disciplines. However, at present we cannot make any claims about this. In general, one could say that English can be regarded as part of the basic tool box of any researcher and the researchers in all fields need to be able to work with English almost irrespective of what they study.

Before concluding, we want to point out that our results – no matter how unambiguous they seem – should be taken with a pinch of salt. Since the survey concentrated on multilingual communication in research context and was advertised with this theme, it is possible that it mainly attracted the attention of researchers who deal with multiple languages and are more tuned to multilingual issues than an average researcher. So, the proportion of researchers who are sensitive to language and translation issues could be overrepresented in our data. After all, the survey respondents consist of only a fraction of the whole research community at UEF. When we analyze our data further, we may learn more about this too.

To gain a more extensive picture of the whole phenomenon, we aim to continue with this project further. We wish to circulate the survey to other universities as well, both nationally and internationally. That would enable us to make more reliable comparisons between disciplines and give us information about possible differences between the research translatoriality in different countries. We also hope to expand our study with qualitative data and make interviews that enable us to get more detailed answers to many of the questions that arise from the mainly quantitative data that we have dealt with so far.

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Research material

The research material consists of answers to an electronic questionnaire survey that was circulated at UEF on two occasions: 10–27 February and 29 May–30 June, 2020. The survey was answered by 114 researchers.

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