

Translators' Needs into account: A Survey on Specialised Lexicographical Resources¹

Isabel Durán-Muñoz²
University of Málaga

Abstract

Lexicography is facing new challenges in the 21st century and therefore, new and more appropriate applications are being developed to satisfy users' needs and to adapt themselves to new technologies. But how satisfied are users with lexicographical resources? Which level of satisfaction is reached by this kind of resource? These questions have already been answered by different scholars regarding different types of users, but what happens with translators? In our opinion, professional translators have always been pushed into the background and therefore, there is a lack of concrete and useful information about them as real users.

In this paper, we will present a survey carried out to improve the development of lexicography regarding professional translators' needs and expectations about specialised lexicographical resources. This project seeks to fill this existing gap by identifying the real needs of translators with regard to terminology. More specifically, here we present the results of a recent survey in which translators were asked which terminological resources they currently use and what resources they would ideally like to use, in order to identify their expectations and desiderata about their "ideal" terminological resource prior to the development of such a resource. It is hoped that the identification of users' needs with regard to terminology could lead to useful resource development projects in the future.

Keywords: specialised lexicographical resources, professional translators, survey.

1. Introduction

It is an unfortunate reality that the majority of resources currently available are of little use to translators, and therefore many are obliged to resort to the creation of their own terminological resources either from comparable corpora or from existing translations. These inadequate resources often pose a problem for translators since it is well known that they usually work under time pressure and they do not have the opportunity to create their own resources. This is the reason why terminological resources have

¹ The research reported in this paper has been carried out in the framework of project BBF2003-04616 (Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology/EU ERDF).

² University of Málaga, iduran@uma.es

considerable importance for them and should meet their requirements as far as possible. Unfortunately, these resources are frequently of poor quality and thus, do not adequately satisfy their needs.

In our opinion, this reality is due to the fact that professional translators have always been pushed into the background and their needs for this kind of resource have hardly ever been seriously taken into consideration. This is the reason why most terminological resources do not fulfill their expectations, both regarding quality and quantity. Therefore, professional translators are frequently obliged to create their own terminological resources, either from *ad hoc* corpora or translation memories.

Moreover, surveys or research conducted so far in relation to lexicographical and terminological resources seem to have been limited to foreign language or translation students and their ability to look up definitions in dictionaries (Bejoint 1981, Roberts 1992, Duvå and Laursen 1994, Dancette and Réthoré 1997, Mackintosh 1998, Varantola 1998, Hartmann 1999, Corpas Pastor *et al.* 2001, Sánchez Ramos 2005, Bogaards 2005, East 2008) but none of them focused on professional translators.³ In this sense, there is a lack of concrete and useful information about these users, who present a number of specific features and needs regarding these resources.

This study set out to investigate how professional translators use terminological resources and which necessities and difficulties they find by doing so. The intention was to provide some insight into professional translators' look-up processes and to examine their needs and expectations, as well as to identify the existing gap between translators' real needs and expectations and the information contained in this kind of resource.

2. Previous studies about resources and users' needs

A number of studies and research about terminological resources and users' needs has been carried out in the last decades, aiming to find out either the adequate content for their potential users or the skills needed to properly use these resources. However, in these studies, to the best of our knowledge, there was no interest in focusing on professional translators as real users and thus, these were ignored and not taken into consideration, although their work is mainly based on the use of this kind of resource.⁴

The majority of these previous studies have been based on foreign language students or translation students but none of them on professional translators. In our opinion, professional translators must be considered as a concrete and different group of users, since they need specific terminological resources to carry out their work and thus, they require concrete information to satisfy their look-up needs. In this sense, they should

³ In their study, Duvå and Laursen (1994) worked with a group of informants who were partly graduates and professional translators (being the latter 38% of the total).

⁴ The documentary phase (above all consultation of terminological resources) in the translation process occupies more than half of the time for the translator.

be considered as real users and therefore, be taken into account during the preparation phase of a terminological resource and offered specific resources.

Previous studies that focus on dictionary use can be classified in two main groups: on the one hand, those which study appropriate skills in dictionary use; and on the other hand, those whose aim is to identify users' (specifically translators') needs and expectations on dictionaries.

The first group, studies about dictionary use skills, claims it is necessary to teach certain skills to students in order to improve the use of lexicographical resources. They consider a dictionary as a special book that, in order to be effectively used, requires certain abilities to find the information being sought, *i.e.* users need specific training for the use of these resources. These authors claim that, used appropriately, the dictionary can be an invaluable tool for learners of a foreign language; but without proper skills the dictionary can be as much of a hindrance as an aid. It seems, however, that many users lack appropriate skills and receive hardly any dictionary training.

Works related to studying how users perceive and use dictionaries have been mainly focused on learners of second languages (Bejoint 1981, Hartmann 1999, Bogaards 2005, East 2008), although we can also find some research about trainee translators (Roberts 1992, Atkins and Varantola 1998, Mackintosh 1998, Varantola 1998, Sánchez-Ramos 2005).

Regarding studies focused on translation students, a number of scholars (Roberts 1992) claims that translators as language users need to know how to effectively consult and use dictionaries in order to complete the translation process with success. So, to them, it is essential to further study the relationship between trainee translators and specialised dictionaries and thus, they carry out empirical researches on habits of use, needs and different problems that dictionaries can cause to students.

The second group mentioned above, studies about translators' needs and expectations, is closer to our research. As we said above, the previous studies carried out regarding this topic were all focused on translation students (Duvå, G. and Laursen 1995, Dancette and Réthoré 1997, Corpas *et al.* 2001). Up to now, we have not found any study about professional translators' needs and expectations. In order to solve this existing gap of research, we carried out our study, which will be described in the following sections.

The aim of these previous studies was to identify the resources that translation students use when they are translating a text and the necessities or difficulties that they find during the process, *i.e.* which information they consult (grammar, definition, etc.) and where they look it up, which difficulties they find when they are consulting a specific term or construction, among others.

In our case, the goal is similar to these studies but the recipients are different. We intend to find out what and how professional translators consult terminological resources and which problems or difficulties they find when they do so. Also, which sort of information they would like to find in a resource of this kind.

As results, all these previous studies conclude that translators –without distinguishing between students and professionals- require the following information: linguistic information (*e.g.* definitions), semantic information (*e.g.* semantic relations), and pragmatic information (*e.g.* context).

In our study, we will try to find out if these requirements are also demanded by professional translators or if, on the contrary, they need some different data.

2. The Survey: Description and Results

Terminological works always start from a study about the potential users of a resource project, in order to know which needs they have, what they expect, and which information they do (not) require. According to Stein (1984: 4):

Dictionaries are obviously written for their users. We therefore need much more research on the dictionary user, his needs, his expectations, and his prejudices.

Bergenholtz and Tarp (1995: 77) also point out the necessity of carrying out previous communication with the potential user before starting the terminological work so as to include, or exclude, specific information.

Lexicographical work often proceeds without any prior knowledge of the potential user group, and the dictionary may therefore be said to be the result of the lexicographer's own conjectures concerning user needs for lemmata, collocations, sentence examples, encyclopaedic and linguistic information, etc. To acquire more precise knowledge, the lexicographer may make a user survey before starting actual work on the dictionary, with the aim of uncovering the needs of potential users in relation to the information categories to be incorporated in the dictionary as well as the representation of this information.

For professional translators, this research is absolutely essential if we take into account that translators spend a substantial amount of time and effort consulting these sources (Varantola 1998). In other words, professional translators need to be considered as real users and then, be asked which needs and expectations they have.

These studies about users can be carried out by employing different empirical techniques in their methodology: protocol technique, which is characterized by the fact that informants, at the same time as they are carrying out a particular activity, register exactly what they are doing (Atkins and Varantola 1998, Duvå, G. and Laursen 1995); personal interview, which may be applied either on its own or in combination with other methods and consists of a personal interview with the informants, who are asked direct questions about a previous task or about their experience (Duvå, G. and Laursen 1995); or questionnaire/survey, by which informants answer some previously defined questions about a specific topic, which can be very diverse (multiple choice, Yes/No questions, etc.) (Corpas *et al.* 2001).

These three methods present both advantages and disadvantages, and they must be selected according to the requirements of the research. We preferred to employ the survey method due to the advantages it presents against the other techniques.

The main advantage of this technique is the possibility of reaching a very large population in a very short time, which is not possible with other empirical methods. Also, it can be administered from remote locations using mail, email or telephone; it is feasible to make more precise measurement by enforcing uniform and comparable answers and automatic quantitative analysis. Another basic advantage is that filling in survey questions is less time-consuming than other empirical methods, which is very important taking into account that our recipients (professional translators) do not have a lot of time to waste filling in surveys.

Nevertheless, it is also important to take the disadvantages into account and try to minimise their negative effects: lack of interest and participation, and lack of reliability in answers. These two problems can be reduced if the target population is well established and the channels of distribution are also well selected. In our case, these two disadvantages were to some extent eliminated by focusing on professional translators as the target recipients and by selecting the professional associations, organisations, etc. as the distribution channels.

2.1. Preparation and Description of the Survey

This survey was designed in line with recent established survey practices (Dillman 2007, Groves *et al.* 2008) and launched in July 2008 in English, Spanish, Italian and German. It was activated during the following three months⁵ and sent to professional translators via specialised mailing lists (Corpora List, The Linguist, Termilat, Traducción. among others), and through several organisations for translators and interpreters (ACT, AIETI, ASETRAD, ITI, ASTTI, etc.). It was also sent out to a number of translation companies as well as individual translators. These contacts were not limited to one country, or several countries, but to organisations, companies, translators, etc. around the world.

The survey was addressed to all types of translation professionals (translators, terminologists, project managers, subtitlers, etc.) (see Figure 1 below). Its main goal was to shed light on their opinion about the current terminological resources and on their use of these resources and their needs while translating. Moreover, we aimed to obtain information about the different terminological resources they used and their preferences regarding content and organisation.

In total, 402 answers were obtained during the period the survey was open, from which can be drawn conclusions on the elaboration of terminological resources for translators in any specialised domain.

During the preparation phase, there were several important issues that had to be carefully considered. For instance: how can one get information on what the users

⁵ The survey link was <http://clg.wlv.ac.uk/surveys/survey.php?sid=29>.

need and expect? Or how can the researcher be sure about what participants understand from the question? In order to minimise any misunderstanding, ambiguity or loss of information due to the issues above, a pilot study was carried out prior to the survey being completely designed. This previous study was addressed to domain-related experts, *i.e.*, experts in translation and terminology, aiming to enhance the initial version of the survey and to elaborate a survey which covered the proposed necessities and goals to this study. To do so, these experts were contacted through e-mail and asked to fill in the survey and give some feedback (comments, recommendations, proposals, etc.). Once the feedback was received, the appropriate changes were made and the final version was completed. Hence, a high quality survey was obtained where all the relevant questions were included in a clear, simple and direct way.

The survey consists of 20 questions in total, classified in 4 different parts: 1. Professional information; 2. Working environment; 3. Terminological resources, and 4. Assessment of resources used by translators and their views on 'ideal' resources

The first part of the survey (first two parts) was focused on the characterisation of participants, so as to obtain information about different aspects of their academic and professional experience. The informants were asked to provide information about their background (education, profession, experience) and about their working environment (working languages, domains/genres that they usually translate, use of internet). The second part focused more specifically on various aspects of terminological resources: users were asked to identify the terminological resources that they use (encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauri, parallel corpora/texts, etc.), the format of these resources, the organisation structure they prefer, etc. Finally, users were asked about their own assessment of the resources. In doing so they were asked to consider any problems or inconveniences they may have experienced, taking into account issues of presentation and information they thought should be present in an "ideal" terminological resource.

2.2. Results of the Survey

In order to briefly illustrate the participants' profile, we will present some general information obtained in the first part of the survey.

The respondents who declared themselves to be translators totalled 62.55%, 13.67% were interpreters, 6.67% project managers, 5.24% terminologists, 3.00% subtitlers, and 8.80% worked in another profession (see Figure 1).

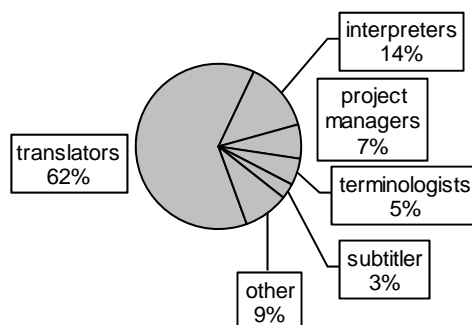


Figure 1. Participants

The majority indicated that they held a degree in Translation and Interpreting (61.96%), or at least had some studies in this domain (Translation Memory courses, specialised translations, etc.), and only 5.08% reported not having a professional qualification relevant to their job. Their professional experience was more than 10 years in 41.65% of cases, and their working language was mainly English in any type of specialised domain (32.12%), followed by Spanish (15.80%), French (15.21%), German (9.94%) and Italian (6.80%).⁶ Regarding the most common working specialised domain,⁷ the volume of translations in the legal domain occupies the first position with a 36.57%, followed by business translations (34.82%). Next, we find translation in the ICT domain (30.35%), humanities (28.11%), and arts, literature or media with 27.6% (see Figure 2).

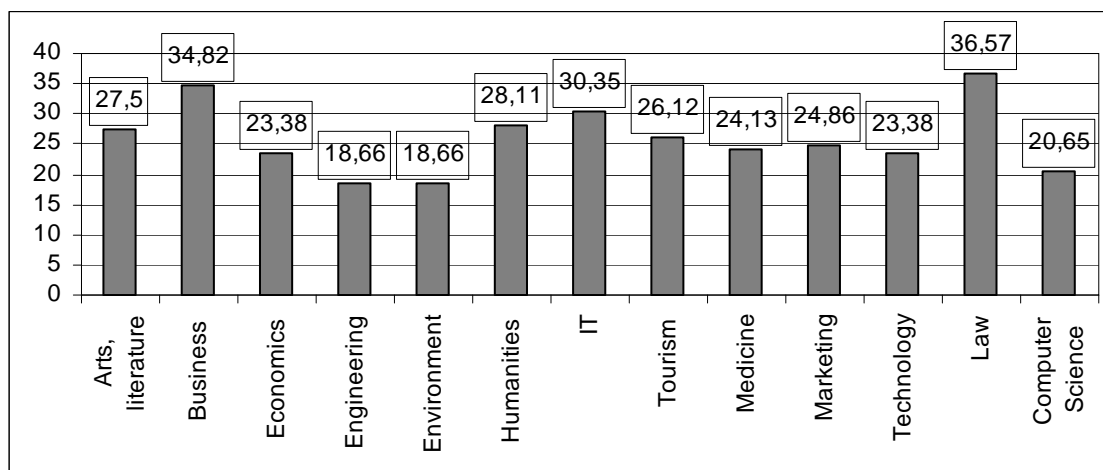


Figure 2. Specialised domains with a percentage over 20%

This question was not a restricted one and translators were able to select several specialised domains, which gave us an idea about the number of different domains in which they work. According to these results, the average number of different working domains for translators is six, although there are also professionals who only work in one domain or who work in more than ten. At the same time, some professionals work in close domains, such as business, mathematics/statistics, economics and marketing, but others work in very different domains, *e.g.* law, handwork, geography and ICT.

⁶ Apart from these four languages, translators were able to select 36 other languages, among them Greek, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Ukrainian, etc.

⁷ The specialised domains included in the survey were taken from the British Institute of Translation and Interpreting (ITI. URL: <http://www.itl.org.uk/indexMain.html>).

Once we have presented the participants' features, we will continue to describe their preferences and their needs regarding terminological resources.

The participants prefer online resources (56.47%) to any other type (electronic resources accounted for 24.71% and paper-based 18.82%) mainly due to easy and quick access. This fact indicates that professional translators need high-quality online terminological resources so as to provide good results in their translations. However, most of the online resources currently available obtain a very poor qualification against electronic or paper-based resources in a study carried out to assess this kind of tools.⁸

Translators prefer bilingual (39.45%) to monolingual resources in the target language (25.56%) and source language (24.12%), and above all to multilingual resources (10.88%). This information is relevant to terminologists, since the most convenient resources for these users prove to be bilingual resources, or at least monolingual, rather than multilingual. This is due to the fact that they consider multilingual resources as having lower quality and being less useful in their work.

To the question, "Which type of terminological resources do you use more when translating?," the participants selected from the list⁹ included in Table 1.

Bilingual Specialised Dictionary/Glossary	18.94%
Searches in search engines (<i>Google</i>)	16.13%
Terminological Databases	8.84%
Monolingual Specialised Dictionary/Glossary (L1)	8.63%
Wikipedia	8.63%

Table 1. "Which type of terminological resources do you use more when translating?"

In this table, only the first five resources are shown, since they have been chosen to be the resources more used by professional translators. According to these results, the preferred resources by our participants are specialised bilingual dictionaries (18.94%), followed by searches in search engines like *Google* (16.13%). The third position is occupied by terminological databases (8.84%), followed by monolingual dictionaries (L1) (8.63%), and Wikipedia (8.63%). In the following positions, we find other resources, such as monolingual specialised dictionaries (7.83%) or parallel corpora (5.09%), but with a lower percentage.

⁸ The study for the assessment of these resources has also been carried out within the framework of the project BBF2003-04616 (Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology/EU ERDF), but it is not been published yet.

⁹ To consult the complete list of resources and their percentages, see Appendix 1.

Here we observe some unexpected data regarding Wikipedia, since, according to this information, this resource occupies the fifth position among the preferred resources by professional translators. Hence, it must be considered as a common and frequently used resource by these users¹⁰ and therefore, as a new possibility of searching information, despite the negative criticisms that this resource has received due to its doubtful reliability.

With regard to the basic criteria to assess currently available terminological resources, 38.71% of the participants indicated that they do not use any resource if this is not reliable, against 33.71%, who considered that it is not always possible to find reliable resource and 19.11%, who affirmed that they do not carry out any previous assessment of the resource.

In order to identify the most relevant criteria employed by the participants to determine the reliability and quality of resources, they were asked to order seven different assessment criteria, from 1 to 7, where 1 was the most relevant criterion of selection. The criteria ordered according to their preferences were the following: 1. Authorship; 2. Specialisation of the website; 3. Richness of information; 4. How up to date it is; 5. Ease of access; 6. External comments about the resource, and 7. Instructions for use. According to these results, professional translators consider authorship as the most important criterion of reliability, followed by the specialisation of the website, and as the least relevant the external comments about the resource and the inclusion of instructions for use.

We will now present the results of the key question of the survey: “What do you think a good terminological resource for translators should offer?” The different options were based on categories included in ISO 12620:1999. The results differed somehow but in general they coincide in the information which should be considered essential, desirable and irrelevant. With these results, terminographers of resources for translators will have a very clear idea about which information translators need, prefer and expect and what is irrelevant to them. Also, terminographers can identify the information that is not required as essential by translators but which can be interesting to include in a resource targeted to them, *i.e.* desirable data.

Essential data	Desirable data	Irrelevant data
Clear and concrete definitions	A great variety of units (n., v., adv., adj.)	Etymological information
Equivalentents	An explanation of each translation equivalent	Pronunciation
Derivatives and	A greater variety of	Syllabification

¹⁰ The percentage obtained by the resource Wikipedia is low (8.63%), but here we must take into account that participants were able to select different resources at once and this is why none of the percentages are very high. In Appendix 1, the total selections of each resource are shown in the first column.

compounds	examples	
Domain specification	Grammatical information	
Examples	Semantic information (semantic relations, frames)	
Phraseological information	Pictorial illustrations	
A definition in both languages (if bilingual) (45.11%)	A definition in both languages (if bilingual) (45.38%)	
Abbreviations and acronyms	Instructions for use	

Table 2. What do you think a good terminological resource for translators should offer?

From this table we can draw some conclusions about what professional translators need and expect from a terminological resource. Undoubtedly, these users require information that helps them to codify the new message, that is: on the one hand, linguistic information (definitions, equivalents, collocations, acronyms, etc.); and on the other hand, pragmatic information (domain specification, context). The rest is desirable but not essential, i.e. semantic information, images, grammatical information, etc.

There is only one option that is repeated both as essential and desirable data, which is "definition in both languages". This is due to the fact that their percentages are so similar (45.11% and 45.38%, respectively) that makes clear that there is not an agreement among professional translators regarding this point. Therefore, it would be terminographers' decision to provide both or just one definition in their terminological resource for translators.

To conclude, the survey also offered the opportunity to give some feedback through an open question ("Do you have any other suggestion about the content of a good terminological resource for translators?"). The answers given were very interesting and these are some of the most repeated:

- Exportability (.txt or .tmx)
- Clarifications and examples about use (the translations that should NOT be used because they are tricky, inconvenient, false cognates, etc.)
- Information on example sources (references, URLs, etc.)
- Cultural differences between source and equivalent term, and regional variations.
- Links to other resources.

In other words, options and information that are not usually included in this kind of resource and that are required by these specific users. Consequently, it is clear that professional translators have hardly ever been taken into account as potential users when elaborating terminological resources.

3. Conclusions

The results obtained in this research clarify the needs and expectations that professional translators as real users have. We now know more about their opinion regarding the current terminological resources and have given them the opportunity to describe their “ideal” resource.

Translators are not real experts in the numerous and different domains they work in and thus, their translation process is mainly based on all the terminological resources they consult. Hence, they need appropriate resources including adequate information in order to satisfy their needs and thus, to be able to provide high quality results in their translations.

The results obtained from this research differ from the conclusions drawn in previous studies (based on trainee translators and second language students), which defended the needs to include linguistic, pragmatic and semantic information in resources for translators. Here we see that professional translators consider semantic information (semantic relations, semantic frames or domains, etc.) as desirable data but not as essential data, *i.e.* they do not see this information as essential but only as complementary. Consequently, we observe how trainee translators need different information than professional translators and therefore, it is necessary to know their specific needs in order to elaborate resources for these professionals.

Also, it is relevant to take into consideration their needs to easily and quickly access information in online resources and to find good and concrete definitions together with pragmatic information (context, tips of use, information about false friends, etc.) which help them understand the source term and correctly translate it.

References

- ATKINS, B. S. and VARANTOLA, K. (1998). Monitoring dictionary use. In B. S. Atkins (ed.). *Using Dictionaries*. Tübingen: Niemeyer: 83-122.
- BEJOINT, H. (1981). The foreign student's use of monolingual English dictionaries: A study language needs and reference skills. *Applied Linguistics*, 2 (3): 207-221
- BERGENHOLTZ, H. and TARP, S. (1995). *Manual of specialised lexicography: the preparation of specialised dictionaries*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- BOGAARDS, P. (2005). A propos de l'usage du dictionnaire de langue étrangère. *Cahiers de Lexicologie*, 52(1): 131-152.
- CORPAS PASTOR, G., LEIVA ROJO, J. and VARELA SALINAS, M. J. (2001). El papel del diccionario en la formación de traductores e intérpretes: análisis de necesidades y encuestas de uso. In M. C. Ayala Castro (ed.). *Diccionarios y enseñanza*. Alcalá: Universidad de Alcalá: 239-273.

- DANCETTE, J. and C. RÉTHORÉ. (1997). Le dictionnaire bilingue (anglais-français) de la distribution: entre dictionnaire de langue et encyclopédie. *Meta* XLII(2): 229–243.
- DILLMAN, D. (2007). *Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- DUVÁ, G. and LAURSEN, A. L. (1995). Translation and LSP Lexicography: A User Survey. In H. Bergenholtz and S. Tarp (eds.). *Manual of Specialised Lexicography. The preparation of specialised dictionaries*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 247-267.
- EAST, M. (2008). *Dictionary Use in Foreign Language Writing Exams. Impact and implications*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- GROVES, R, F. FOWLER, M. COUPER, J. LEPKOWSKI, E. SINGER and R. TOURANGEAU (2004). *Survey Methodology*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- HARTMANN, R. R. K. (1999). Case study: the Exeter University survey of dictionary use [Thematic Report 2]. In R. Hartmann (ed.) *Dictionaries in Language Learning*. Berlin: Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages: 36-52.
- MACKINTOSH, K. (1998). An empirical study of dictionary use in L2-L1 translation. In B. S. Atkins (ed.). *Using Dictionaries*. Tübingen: Niemeyer: 123-149.
- ROBERTS, R. P. (1992). Translation pedagogy: strategies for improving dictionary use. *TTR. Traduction, Terminologie et Rédaction*, 5(1): 49-76
- SÁNCHEZ RAMOS, M. M. (2005). Research on Dictionary Use by Trainee Translators. *Translator Journal*, 9(2). URL: <http://accurapid.com/journal/32dictuse.htm> [Consulted on 15/12/2009].
- STEIN, G. (1984) *The English dictionary: past, present and future*. Special lecture given at the inauguration of the Dictionary Research Centre. Exeter: Exeter University Press.
- VARANTOLA, K. (1998). Translators and their use of dictionaries. In B. S. Atkins (ed.). *Using Dictionaries*. Tübingen: Niemeyer: 179-192.

Appendix 1:

Monolingual specialised dictionary/glossary (L1)	129	8.63%
Monolingual specialised dictionary/glossary (L2)	117	7.83%
Bilingual specialised dictionary/glossary	283	18.94%
Multilingual specialised dictionary/glossary	42	2.81%
Monolingual visual dictionary	8	0.54%
Bilingual visual dictionary	20	1.34%
Section Images in a search engine (like Google)	53	3.55%
Searches in search engines (like Google)	241	16.13%
Parallel corpora (original texts and their translations)	76	5.09%
Comparable corpora (original texts in both languages)	69	4.62%

Terminological database	132	8.84%
Encyclopaedia	46	3.08%
Wikipedia	129	8.63%
Mailing lists	24	1.61%
Internet forum	62	4.15%
Thesaurus	48	3.21%
Other	15	1.00%