

What do publishers think about technologically assisted literary translation? Finnish literary publishers as a case in point

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Background: related research

- Literary translators' experiences, perceptions and needs
 - Empirical studies on MT + PE in literary translation: e.g. Moorkens et al. 2018; Ó Murchú, 2019; Kenny & Winters 2020; Guerberof-Arenas & Toral 2020, 2022, 2024; Vieira et al. 2023; Hansen 2024.
 - Surveys and interviews (Slessor 2020; Salmi 2022; Daems 2022; Ruffo 2022; CEATL 2024; Ruokonen & Salmi 2024; Buzelin 2024)
- Publishers' views on translation technology
 - Only few studies so far: CEATL's (European Council of Literary Translators' Associations) AI survey for member associations (2023) and Helena Zihlerl's BA thesis (Lund University).

A Swedish publisher who has relied on MTPE for a year: **traditional literary translation “is likely to disappear in the near future”** (Zihlerl 2024, 12)

Most studies indicate that MTPE is not the optimal method for literary translation.

Literary translators' translation technology use is "a diverse and changing landscape" (Buzelin 2024).

Publishers in general seem to be **reluctant to take the full steps towards AI but are not ruling it out either** (CEATL 2023, 16)

Publishing industry in Finland

- Finnish: a Finno-Ugric language with ca. 5 million speakers
- Translated fiction constitutes 41 to 51.5% of the sales of Top20 titles (2014–2023; Salmi & Ratinen 2025)
 - Notably translations from English
- Since ca. 2020:
 - Popularity of audiobooks and e-books → increased number of titles, rushed schedules, shortage of translators
 - Dramatic decrease in sold printbooks and number of bookstores
 - Young/YA readers often prefer to read in English

Technology perceptions and needs among literary translators and publishers: survey and interviews

Translators (SL/TL Finnish)

- Survey (n=72)
 - March 2023, based on Daems (2022)
- Interviews (n=7)
 - April 2023, from the population of the survey respondents

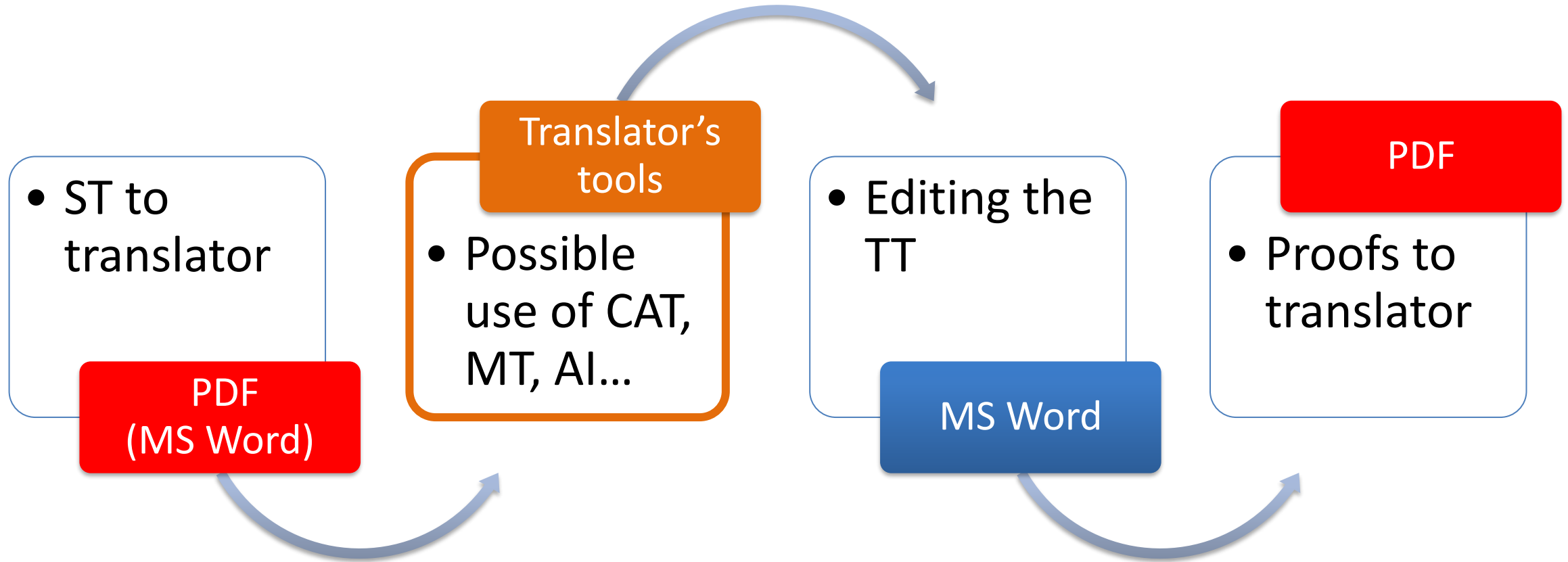
Publishers (TL Finnish)

- Survey (n=17)
 - Spring 2025
- Interviews (n=5)
 - Summer 2025
 - 4 from among respondents of the survey, 1 other

Results

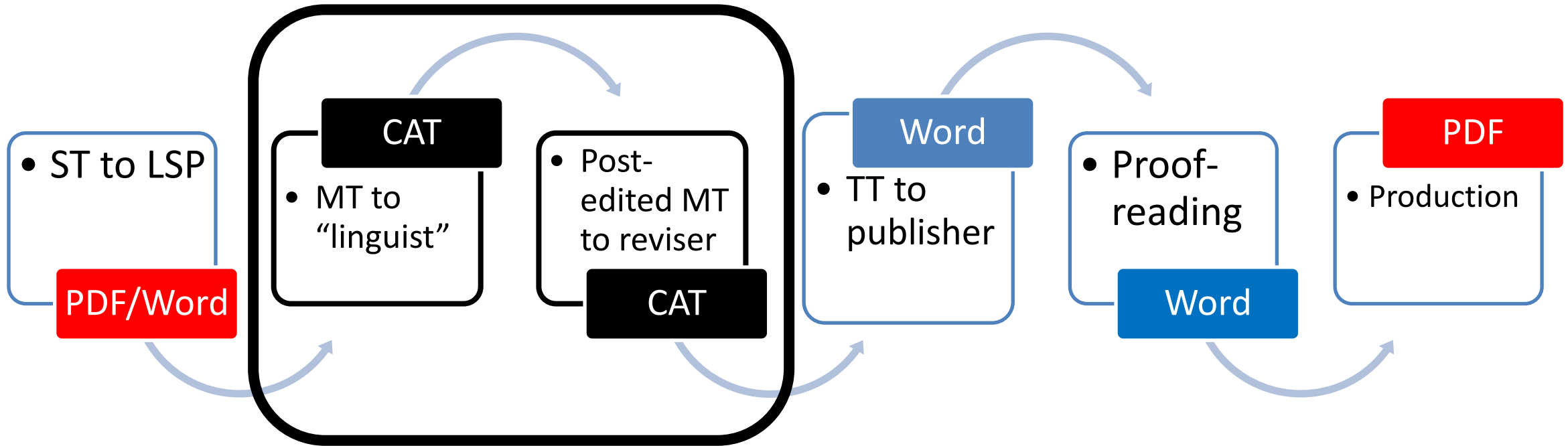
- Two workflows
- Publishers' (and translators') attitudes to technology
 - Usefulness
 - Advantages
 - Concerns

TYPICAL WORKFLOW FROM PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE



- Direct communication between publisher and translator throughout
- Translator approves final proofs
- If translator uses CAT, their workflow is cut off at the editing stage

MTPE WORKFLOW FROM PUBLISHER'S PERSPECTIVE (INTERVIEWEE A)



- Publisher and “linguist” [=translator] do not communicate
- Extra proof-reading by publisher may be required to ensure quality
- Final proofs not sent to linguist for approval
- Published translation attributed to “Company X / Linguist Y”

Publishers' attitudes to translation technology and AI

Has the use of translation technology or AI been discussed at your workplace?

	n
Yes	14
No	3
	17

4 respondents reported that their employer is **testing the use of translation technology and/or AI**

How would you describe your employer's general attitude towards translation technology and AI? (Open question)

	n
Positive	4
Neutral	9
Negative	2
Cannot say	1
No answer	1
	17

Perceived usefulness (1): TM and terminology tools

Is **TM software** useful or could it be useful to literary translators / publishers?

	Tr	Pub
Never	8%	6%
Sometimes	63%	59%
Often	17%	29%
Always	13%	6%
	100%	100%

Could **terminology tools** be useful to literary translators / publishers?

	Tr	Pub
Never	6%	0%
Sometimes	57%	47%
Often	28%	47%
Always	10%	6%

Perceived usefulness (2): MT and AI

Could the following tools be useful to literary publishers?

	Never		Sometimes		Often		Always	
	Trans	Publ	Trans	Publ	Trans	Publ	Trans	Publ
General MT	29%	29%	54%	41%	13%	24%	4%	6%
Domain-specific MT	18%	6%	67%	59%	11%	35%	4%	0
Interactive and adaptive MT	17%	6%	67%	41%	15%	53%	4%	0
Generative AI	N/A	12%	N/A	53%	N/A	35%	N/A	0

Perceived advantages of translation technology

Translators

- **advanced searches**
- TM: no passages are overlooked, **noticing repeated phrases or expressions**
- terminology tools: **consistency**
- MT: understanding source text, source of inspiration
- **MTPE: perhaps particularly for genre fiction**

Publishers

- **advanced searches**
- TM: **repetitions, consistency** when several translators or when translating a series
- terminology: **consistency**
- **MTPE: perhaps particularly for genre fiction**
- **more advanced language proofing tools for Finnish needed**
- **tools in general can help translators “focus on what they do best”**
(Interviewee C)

Concerns mentioned by publishers (and by translators)

1) CALT in general

- Incompatible with literary texts, human creativity?
- Incompatible with translators' working methods?
- Doubts about product quality

2) Author/translator copyright and data protection

- contracts may categorically prohibit AI/MT use
- what happens to translators' agency?

Concluding remarks and further questions

- Literary translators' and publishers' views similar in several respects
- Some literary translators already use CAT tools but publishers not interested in incorporating them in their workflows
- Some literary translators and publishers believe that CAT tools and/or MTPE are more appropriate for translating genre fiction; others contradict this
 - AI translation of genre fiction potentially major risk for the literary ecosystem (Ziherl 2024, 18-19)



Thank you!

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Project

Narrative Text, Translator and Machine

<https://sites.utu.fi/littra/en/>

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