



## Institutional translation in Oman: An investigation of social, technical, and organisational factors

**Rafik Jamoussi**

Sohar University

Sohar, North Batinah Governorate, Oman

rjamoussi@su.edu.om

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3036-8968> 

**Aladdin Al Zahran**

Sohar University

Sohar, North Batinah Governorate, Oman

aalzahran@su.edu.om

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5382-6007> 

**Fouad El Karnichi**

Sohar University

Sohar, North Batinah Governorate, Oman

fkarnichi@su.edu.om

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3841-6613> 

**Arwa Saif Al Saidi**

Independent Researcher

Sohar, North Batinah Governorate, Oman

arwa.saif.khalfan@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-3823-3002> 

**Abstract:** Translation outside the context of Language Service Providers (LSPs) represents a sizeable share of the translation market. However, this facet of the activity remains less visible and less open to monitoring. This study investigates translation as a situated practice in the context of Oman within institutions where the translation activity does not represent a primary purpose. Adopting a quantitative approach, the study employed an online survey to investigate indicators of the institutionalization of translation, such as resourcing, working conditions, distribution of work, interaction, workflows, and quality management policies. The findings show that translation activities within institutions in Oman are thriving. However, the study revealed that translation practices are subject to considerable variation and that, despite notable exceptions, translation is frequently affected by challenges related to inadequate staffing, resources, and quality assurance procedures. These practices are mainly ad hoc, providing little evidence that translation needs are treated as an integral part of the institution's functioning. These findings align with observations in other contexts and underscore the need to recognise the significant role translation plays in the functioning of the institution and the need to effectively integrate translation activities within their institutional environments to enhance quality standards in this often-overlooked segment of the translation industry. More generally, the findings confirm the necessity for Translation Studies to appreciate the significance of institutional translation as a facet of translation as a situated activity.

**Keywords:** Institutional translation; translation workflows; translation as a situated practice; quality management; standards.



## I. Introduction

The translation industry has succeeded in establishing itself as a distinct field of professional activity. However, translation does not always occur in an ideal context where all parties involved are fully aware of the latest developments in the field or adhere to established codes of practice and standards. Translation is highly dependent on the context in which it is performed. While translation bureaus may represent a normative environment for professional translation, they are only one facet of the remunerated translation activity. Translation is also frequently carried out "in situ," in the locations where the need for it arises. It is this institutional context that the current project seeks to investigate.

The notion of institution is a complex concept in sociology, and researchers often warn of its intricacies (Kang, 2019; Koskinen, 2008) and "slipperiness" (Kang, 2014, p. 471). When investigating the concept from a translation perspective, it is often used in a narrow and concrete sense, referring to structures such as "companies, governments, newspapers, churches, and literary publishers" (Mossop, 1990, p. 342; see also Kang, 2019 and Koskinen, 2008). Hence, a translating institution is defined as a workplace that uses the services of translators to produce translations for its own use, either directly (in-house) or indirectly (through outsourcing) (Gouadec, 2007; Mossop, 1988, 1990; Schäffner *et al.*, 2014).

The investigation of the types and nature of translation activities within institutions was once "neglected" (Mason, 2012, p. 399), and was even referred to as a "missing factor in translation theory" (Mossop, 1988, p. 65). However, in recent years, there has been a growing focus on this area as a spin-off of increased interest in translation as a situated activity (Angelelli, 2014; Ehrensberger-Dow, 2021; Monzó-Nebot & Lomeña-Galiano, 2024; Schäffner, 2018; Tolosa Iguualada, 2016; Wolf, 2010). It is this interest that led Chesterman to propose the extension of Holmes' map of translation studies with a new branch he called "translator studies". In this field, the focus is on the "agents involved in translation [...], their interaction with their social and technical environment, or their history and influence" (Chesterman, 2009, p. 20).

The current focus on institutional translation indicates a recognition of the significance of this type of translation and marks a departure from more traditional fieldwork approaches where, as Koskinen puts it, "researchers have been encaged [...] in translation agencies, amongst subcontracting translators, in publishing houses, as well as in interpreted conference sessions and authentic community interpreting situations" (Koskinen, 2008, p. 38. See also Schäffner, 2018).

This line of investigation seeks to answer questions about how translation is practiced within institutional settings, including the types of texts that are translated, the languages involved, the modes of translation used, the individuals or teams responsible for translation, and the tools and resources employed (cf. Koskinen, 2008; Prieto Ramos, 2018, 2020b; Schäffner, 2018). The study of institutional translation activities is considered a vital component of the wider focus on translation as a situated activity, which recognizes the importance of context in shaping translation practice. Recent scholarship has highlighted the value of understanding the role of institutional translation activities in the translation profession and in meeting the communication needs of organisations.



The investigation of institutional translation has largely been product-oriented, with a considerable amount of research dedicated to the linguistic features of translated texts in different institutional settings (Schäffner, 2018). Examples of this approach include case studies such as those conducted by Biel (2014), Choi (2020), Fischer (2010), Gagnon (2021), Gagnon & Kalantari (2017), Kang (2007), and Tcaciuc & Mackevic (2017), among others. These projects are often data-driven and employ theoretical frameworks such as comparative linguistics, genre analysis, and functionalist approaches (Schäffner, 2018).

A different research strand adds a focus on the production of institutional translation and the interaction between the multiple agents involved (Ehrensberger-Dow & Jääskeläinen, 2019). These investigations examine the interplay between translation and the working conditions in place, which could be material, such as the use of computerization (Tomasi, 2003), or sociopolitical (Al-Obaidani, 2014). The institutions involved in this research strand could be international news agencies (Davier, 2014), governmental (Svoboda, 2018), non-governmental (Tesseur, 2013, 2017), supranational (Chapter 5 in Koskinen, 2008; Svoboda, 2013), national (De Camillis, 2021; Schäffner *et al.*, 2014), or local (Bernaerts, 2021). This approach is mainly qualitative, and draws on the sociology of translation and ethnography as a conceptual framework (Koskinen, 2008).

By adopting this perspective, these approaches move away from traditional circular or linear organisational patterns that typically revolve around the translator, and instead propose an organisational pattern that can be described as reticular (Lavault-Olléon, 2011, p. 11), involving multilayered socio-technical interactions. To investigate this type of pattern, Lavault-Olléon suggested using ergonomics, particularly organisational ergonomics, as a framework to examine how workflows can either enhance or hinder productivity and efficiency, and whether the socio-technical context fosters job satisfaction (Lavault-Olléon, 2011; see also Bednářová-Gibová & Majherová, 2021). Interest in ergonomics as a framework for the investigation of institutional translation has grown ever since (e.g., Ehrensberger-Dow, 2021; Ehrensberger-Dow & Jääskeläinen, 2019).

With standardization regarded as one of the key features of institutional translation (Svoboda *et al.*, 2017), several research projects have focused on the norms that are put in place to ensure it (Inghilleri, 2003; Schäffner *et al.*, 2014). Studies suggest that these norms are often unwritten and represent elements of institutional culture (Koskinen, 2011). Therefore, they need to be identified indirectly by investigating "norm-governed behaviour" (Toury, 2012, p. 170). For instance, the integration of style guides, terminological databases, computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, and revision procedures are signs of the institutionalization of translation (Koskinen, 2008, 2011).

In Oman, the context in which the present study was conducted, translation has a long history. However, institutional translation has been a more recent development resulting from administrative reform and the growth of an administrative and legal infrastructure since the Omani Renaissance in 1970. Several factors have contributed to the government development plans in Oman, including the establishment of institutions, the adoption of more systematic reporting mechanisms such as annual reports since 1988, and the prevalence of multilingualism and ethnic diversity in the workplace (Al-Issa, 2020).

Despite the potential significance which these socio-linguistic and socio-professional environment developments represent for the growth of translation activities, this aspect has received limited attention from researchers. A single investigation in 2016, focused on the use of



CAT tools among translators in Oman, incidentally sheds some light on the workflows adopted for institutional translation (Jamoussi & Shallal, 2019). Among the different categories of translators, this study found that in-house translators in institutions ranked as the second-largest group, following freelancers and preceding translation agencies. It was also established that the use of CAT tools and collaboration between translators were minimal. More directly related to the topic of the present project is the work undertaken by Al-Obaidani (2014), who, within the framework of a PhD dissertation, scrutinized the production and translation conditions of annual reports in different institutions. Both Al-Obaidani's (2014) and Jamoussi and Shallal's (2019) research suggests that institutional translation accounts for a significant portion of professional translation activity.

By investigating translation practices in Omani institutional contexts, the present project intends to bridge the existing research gap on this topic and provide an initial understanding of the workflows, challenges, and opportunities involved in institutional translation. Such an investigation may offer vital initial data to assess translation practices in institutions and inform decisions that aim to improve and streamline these practices to meet the demands of the multilingual Omani workplace.

For the current project, the term "institution" refers to both public and private professional entities that require translation services on a regular or occasional basis, such as businesses, industries, educational and healthcare establishments, administrative apparatuses within ministries, and social services, etc. (see 3.1). The focus is on translation activities that address the specific needs of these institutions, whether these translations are performed in-house or outsourced. Translation bureaus, where translation is one of the services provided to clients, are excluded from this definition as these translation services do not serve their own internal needs. The contrast between the labels "institutional translation" for the former category and "commercial translation" for the latter (Cadwell *et al.*, 2018) is quite helpful in depicting the difference between the two.

The study assumes a sociological perspective by examining the contexts in which translation needs arise and are fulfilled within institutions. It seeks to explore the level of organisation of translation activities within these contexts, which corresponds to quality aspects that mainly revolve around areas such as workflow management and human and technical resources (Biel, 2017). This organisation reflects the attitudes that institutions have towards translation and how institutionalized this activity is.

The overarching research question can be formulated as follows:

- To what extent are translation practices in Omani institutions standardized?

To provide a comprehensive understanding of this standardization, the study considers the following sub-questions:

- What institutional procedures are in place to govern translation activities?
- How are the translators' professional conduct and product negotiated and monitored?
- What are the typical translation workflows?
- Who are the key stakeholders involved in the translation process, and what is their background and role?
- What are the perceptions of Omani institutions towards translation processes and products?



With the theoretical framework and relevant literature providing the necessary foundation, the following section elaborates on the methodology adopted to address the research questions posed in this study.

## 2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this project, the data collection method employed was an online survey questionnaire. This quantitative approach is commonly utilized in studies of a similar exploratory nature, as in Ehrensberger-Dow et al., (2016) or the European Language Industry Survey initiated in 2013 by the European Union of National Associations of Translation Companies (EUATC) and conducted on a regular basis since then (ELIS, 2022). The data this research self-report yields “can be sorted, quantified, and, if representative enough, used to make generalizations” (Ehrensberger-Dow, 2021, p. 69).

The development of the instrument was informed by aspects of focus treated or envisioned in such works as Biel (2017), Koskinen (2008, p. 35), Schäffner (2018), and more particularly Chesterman (2017, p. 317-318). The final survey instrument consists of five-point Likert scale items together with multiple-choice and open-ended questions. These items are structured around seven main categories, that include language and translation needs, translation practices, internal translation resourcing and conditions, the use of translation technology, outsourcing conditions, perceptions of translation, and quality assurance (QA). Attention was paid to the survey questions to ensure that they were clear, concise, and easy to understand, and that they would elicit the necessary information to answer the research questions. To cater to the language preferences of the respondents, the questions were formulated in both English and Arabic. Subject matter experts reviewed the survey instrument to ensure its validity and reliability. Finally, it was pilot tested, and necessary amendments were made based on the feedback gathered. The survey was granted ethics approval by the Ethics and Biosafety Committee within the authors’ academic affiliation, Sohar University.

The study utilized a self-selection sampling method, which is a non-probability approach based on voluntary participation (Saunders et al., 2012). This method is known to have limitations, such as (a) selection bias, where individuals who opt to participate are inherently different from those who opt out and (b) lower representativeness of the overall population. Both limitations may affect the generalizability of the findings. However, this method is still acceptable for exploratory research purposes, as noted in the literature (see Ehrensberger-Dow, 2021, p. 69 and Saunders et al., 2012, p. 284). To optimise the sample representativeness **and** minimize potential self-selection bias, standard activity sectors were organized into a sampling frame consisting of nineteen categories. This sampling frame was utilized to guide participant recruitment. Invitations to participate in the online survey were sent, and a follow-up protocol was implemented to issue reminders and ensure only one response was collected from each participating institution.



### 3. Results

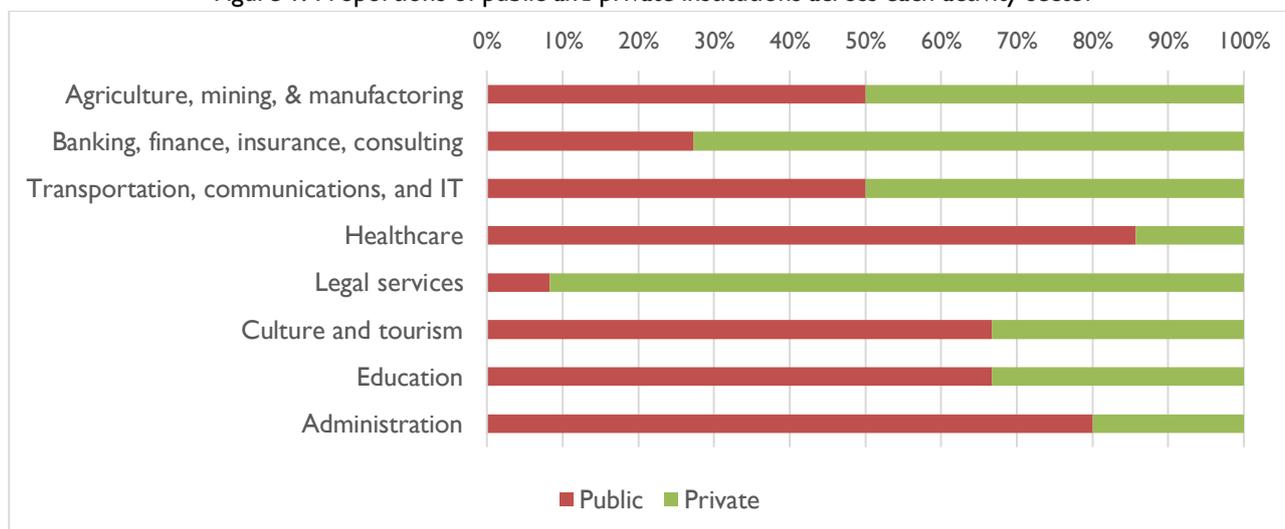
#### 3.1 Demographics

Following a five-month period since the survey's initiation in May 2022, a total of 135 survey invitations were sent, resulting in 73 responses, corresponding to a response rate of about 54%. Respondents had to specify their activity sector by either selecting from a predetermined list or manually adding a new category. The list of pre-set categories and the newly added ones were then consolidated and rearranged into eight distinct activity sector clusters.

- Cluster 1: Agriculture, mining, & manufacturing
- Cluster 2: Banking, finance, insurance, consulting
- Cluster 3: Transportation, communications, and IT
- Cluster 4: Healthcare
- Cluster 5: Legal services
- Cluster 6: Culture and tourism
- Cluster 7: Education
- Cluster 8: Administration

This clustering provides a balanced depiction, offering sufficient granularity to capture necessary details, while maintaining an acceptable level of homogeneity. Respondents were evenly distributed between public and private institutions, with 52% of respondents coming from public institutions and the remaining 48% from private institutions. Figure 1 shows the distribution of public and private respondents across each activity sector.

Figure 1: Proportions of public and private institutions across each activity sector



In addition, respondents were asked to specify the size of their institution using a three-category scale that included the following options: up to 10 employees, between 11 and 50 employees, and 51 employees or more. The results indicated that 15% of the respondents reported

working at institutions with up to 10 employees, 15% reported working at institutions with 11 to 50 employees, and 70% reported working at institutions with 51 employees or more.

### 3.2 Language and translation needs

Of the institutions that participated in the study, over 49% indicated that Arabic was their official language, while 31.5% primarily used English. Approximately 16.44% reported using both Arabic and English. The use of other foreign languages was marginal. Multilingual communication and documentation were reported to be constant or frequent aspects of day-to-day operations for at least 50% of the participating institutions.

When asked about their translation needs, nearly 55% of the participating institutions reported that their needs were constant, while 16% described them as frequent, which was defined in the questionnaire as “occurring weekly” (Figure 2). These needs tended to be more pronounced in medium and large institutions (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Overall translation needs

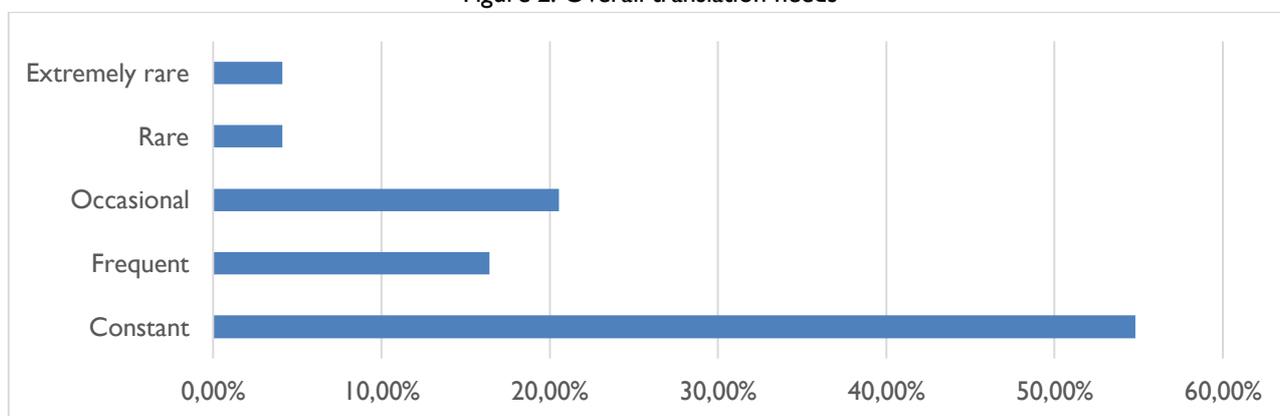
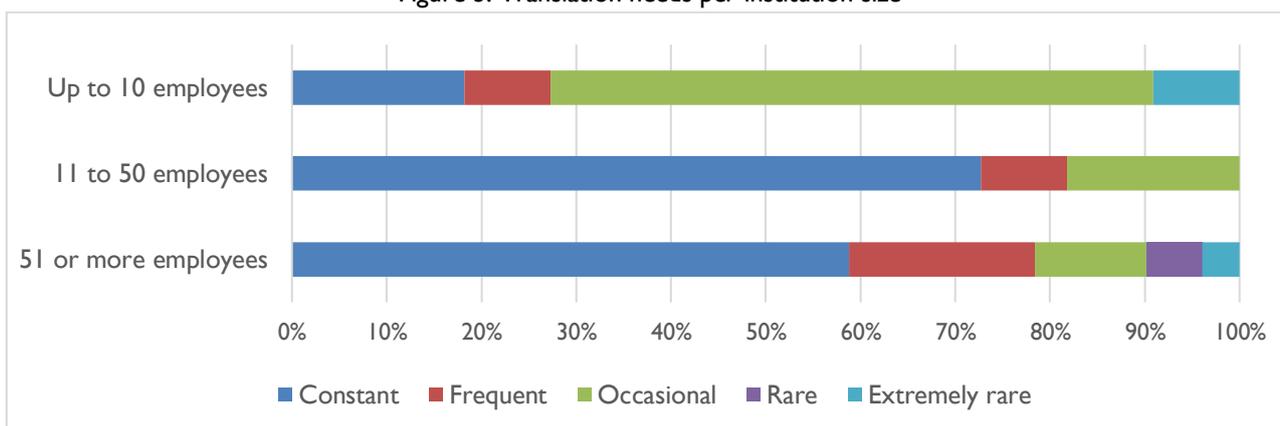
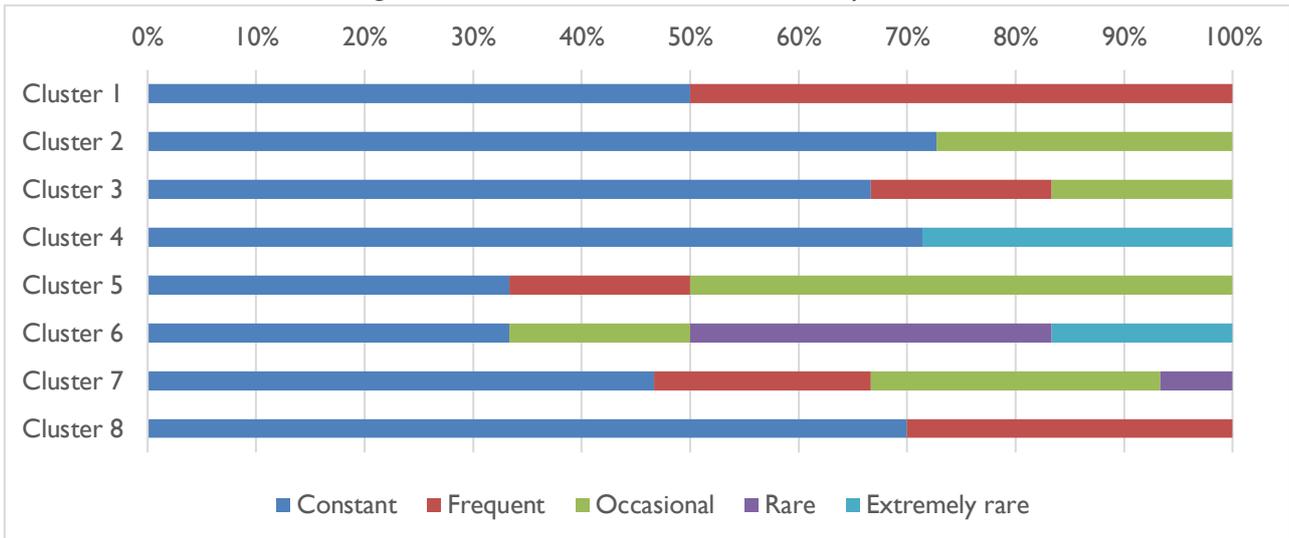


Figure 3: Translation needs per institution size



Furthermore, the results revealed that translation needs permeate all activity sectors (Figure 4) and are mostly bidirectional, with 70% of the participating institutions reporting the need for both incoming and outgoing documentation to be translated.

Figure 4: Translation needs within each activity sector

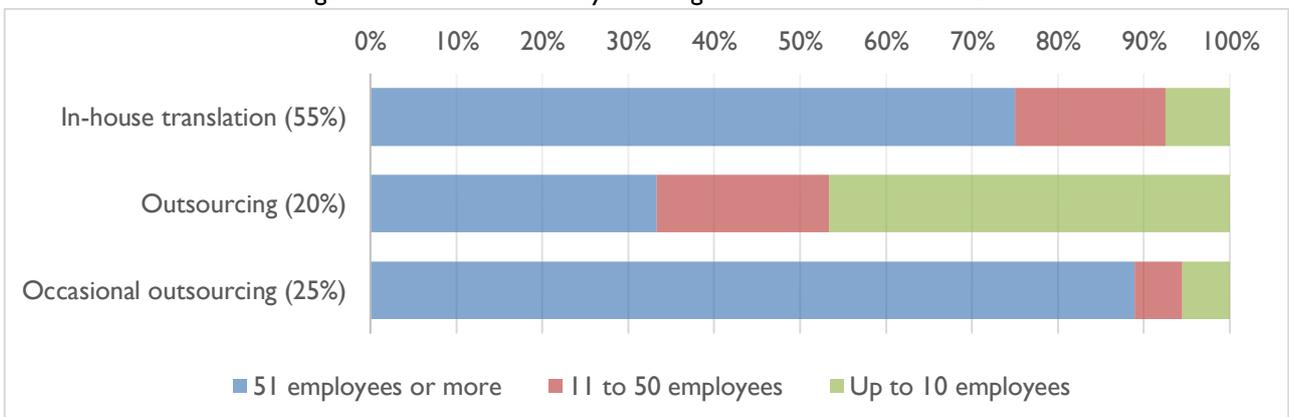


The study results equally indicated that translation needs encompass a diverse range of genres. Alongside standard genres such as contracts and annual reports, there are also less frequently mentioned genres, such as medical reports, email or other correspondence, official documents (e.g., work and study certificates), invitations, meeting minutes, social media content, and bank statements. The results also indicated that a significant proportion of the documentation that needs to be translated is of a confidential nature, with 56% of participating institutions reporting occasional and 20% reporting frequent translation of such documents.

### 3.3 Sourcing

The study's findings on translation sourcing indicated that 55% of participating institutions relied exclusively on internal resources to address their translation needs, or what is commonly referred to as in-house translation. Meanwhile, 25% reported that they occasionally outsource translation tasks in addition to translating in-house. Only 20% of the participating institutions relied fully on outsourcing for their translation needs. The latter category consists of institutions that tend to be smaller (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Translation activity sourcing within each institution size

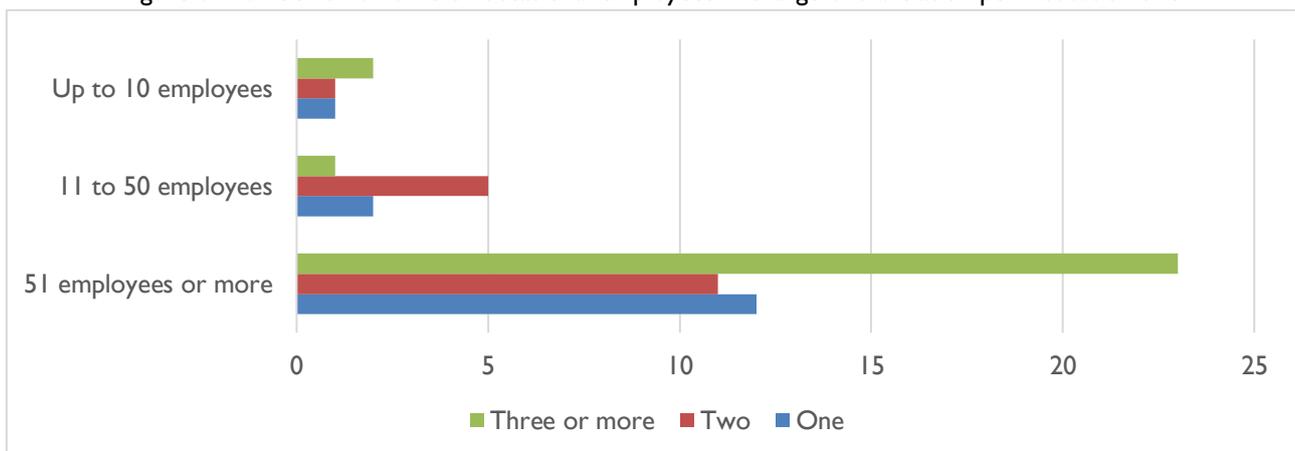


Several factors were reported as the reasons for occasional outsourcing, with document importance being the most significant one. Respondents provided examples such as agreements and cases that require translation certification, as is the case for legal documents. The second reason for outsourcing is time pressure, which is often, though not always, linked to the size of the document to translate. The next reason for occasional outsourcing is document size, with one respondent mentioning that 1500 words represent a threshold for outsourcing. Lack of expertise in the source or target languages or in a specific domain is next on the list of reasons for outsourcing. One respondent mentioned that internal translation is adopted for jobs involving English and Arabic, while outsourcing is resorted to for other languages. Challenge level was reported by only one respondent as a justification for occasional outsourcing.

### 3.4 Internal translation

The figures presented in this sub-section comprise institutions that declared translating internally, whether fully or occasionally. According to the data, the size of the institution is a critical factor in determining the number of employees to whom translation tasks are assigned (either fully or occasionally). Larger institutions were found to be more likely to have the human resources necessary to assign translation tasks to their staff or to employ full-time translators (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of full-time or occasional employees in charge of translation per institution size



In institutions that rely on more than one employee to perform translation tasks, translation is often undertaken without attempting to distribute tasks along the chronological pre-translation, translation, and post-translation workflow axis (59.5%). Interestingly, 4.7% of the respondents indicated that task division depends on the size and domain of the translation job. On the other hand, splitting the document to translate among different employees is more prevalent (69.76%).

The use of industry-standard post-translation processes, such as consistency checks conducted after multiple employees work on different parts of a document, seems to be relatively common (63.33% of respondents). However, one respondent noted that this level of meticulousness depends on the type of document that is being translated. Only 13.33% of respondents stated that

they rely on a shared glossary among different translators of a document to ensure consistency, while 23.33% do not perform any QA process of this type.

Among the institutions that rely on in-house translation, 53.44% employ full-time translators. The employment of full-time translators appears to depend more on translation needs within the institution than on its size. However, over 20% of institutions with constant translation needs do not have full-time translators but rely on employees with other job titles to perform translation tasks.

The survey results revealed various aspects regarding the qualifications of employees who are tasked with translation jobs within institutions. Over half of the institutions (53.5%) that translate in-house fully rely on translators with formal qualifications in translation, and approximately 20.7% rely on at least one employee with formal training, but also assign translation tasks to other employees without formal training. The remaining 20.7% declared that their translators have no formal training in translation. With a few exceptions, the employment of translators with formal qualifications is influenced by the size of the institution and the frequency of translation needs, as shown in Figures 7 and 8. Non-translation specialists who are tasked with translation jobs are selected based on various criteria, such as familiarity with the domain (14.8%), language skills (26%), or both (59.2%).

Figure 7: Translator qualifications by institution size

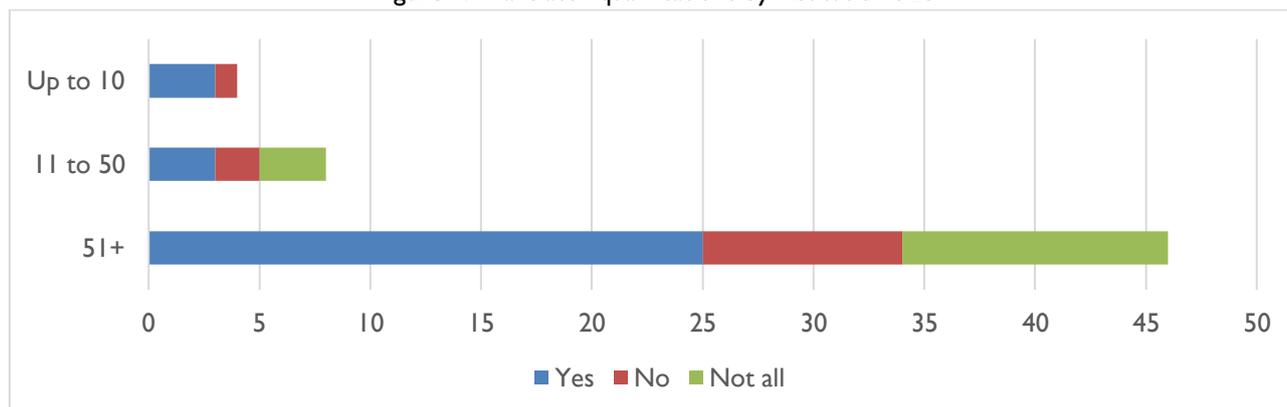
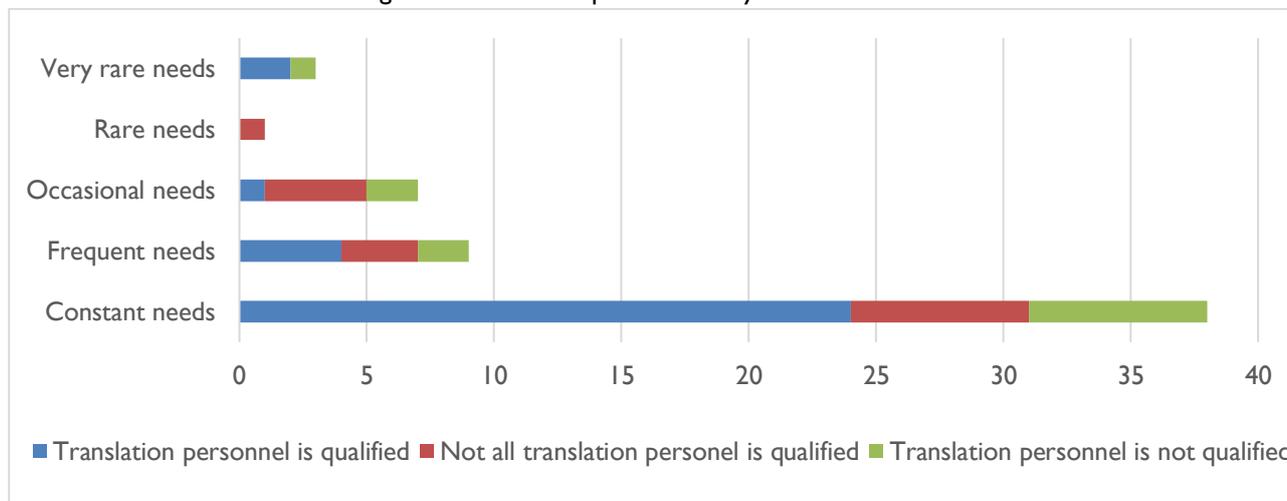


Figure 8: Translator qualifications by translation needs



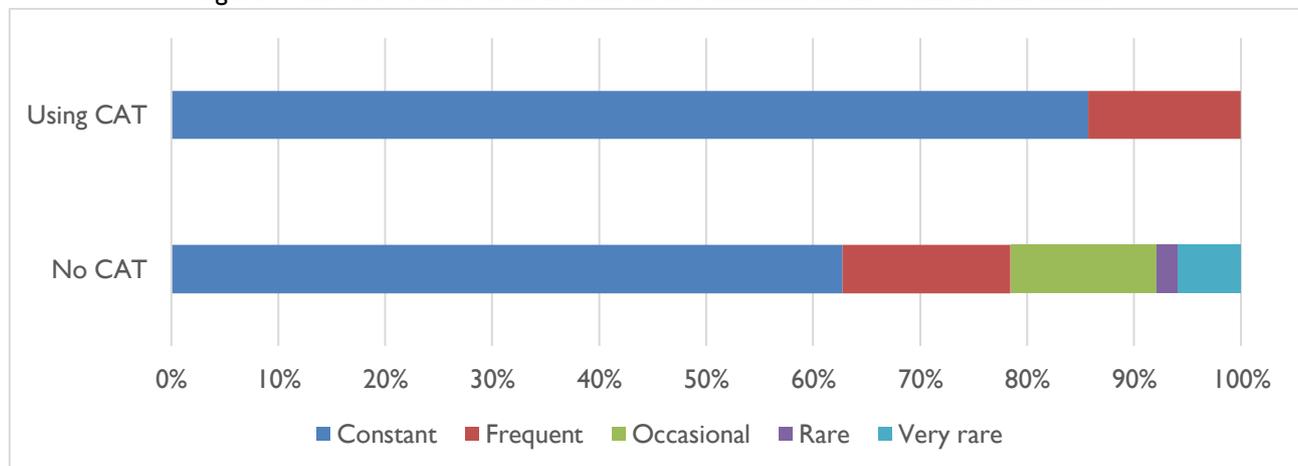
Respondents gave several reasons for relying on non-specialist translators instead of hiring employees with a degree in translation or outsourcing the translation job. The most prominent of these include:

- 1/ The belief that translation tasks are easy (a non-specialised activity) requiring only knowledge of the languages involved. (37% of respondents)
- 2/ The high costs involved in hiring full-time translators (25.9% of responses) or outsourcing to language service providers. (18.5% of responses)
- 3/ The technicality of some domains that require specific knowledge, which is more important than translation skills. (3.7%)
- 4/ The inability of translation job applicants to pass assessment tests. (3.7%).

### 3.5 Resources available to in-house translators

The resources at the disposal of internal translators mainly consist of technical documentation and the expertise of in-house personnel. However, resources that are specifically tailored for translation, such as dictionaries or company glossaries, are comparatively scarce. According to the survey, only 12% of institutions engaged in in-house translation reported the use of CAT tools. The majority of these institutions (85%) were identified as large, and all employed personnel with formal training in translation. On the other hand, 62% of institutions with constant translation needs do not use CAT tools (Figure 9).

Figure 9: The use of CAT tools in relation to translation needs within the institution



### 3.6 Machine translation and confidentiality

Approximately half (51.7%) of the institutions with internal translation activities reported allowing or tolerating the use of online machine translation (MT) services. The other half either prohibited or partially allowed their use. The main reasons provided for this are concerns about the low output quality of online MT services (over 66%) and the need to maintain the confidentiality of

the documents being translated (about 33%). Respondents identified documents of general, administrative, and documentation nature as the most suitable for online processing.

Document confidentiality emerged as a major concern, as almost 88% of respondents mentioned that translators are duly informed when the documents assigned to them are confidential. In some cases, drastic measures are taken to ensure the confidentiality of these documents. For instance, two respondents reported not allowing the use of online CAT tools and completing the translation job in an isolated environment.

### 3.7 Outsourcing

Resorting to outsourcing to fulfil translation requirements was typically attributed to the perceived insignificance of translation needs within the institution and the unavailability of qualified personnel to perform the translation tasks. In the context of legal service institutions, however, the outsourcing of translation tasks was found to be primarily motivated by the prerequisite for translations to be certified.

In 80% of cases, institutions that rely on outsourcing for their translation needs tend to maintain long-term relationships with the same LSPs. However, this relationship rarely materializes in long-term contracts (6.6%). Moreover, almost 40% of the institutions do not involve a bid or tender process in the procurement of translation services.

The findings also suggest that client satisfaction is a critical factor in maintaining long-term partnerships with LSPs. Participants emphasized translation quality and fast delivery times as equally important factors in their overall satisfaction. Interestingly, while rates were still a significant consideration in selecting an LSP, they only ranked third on the list of selection criteria. The same respondent from a legal services company cited LSP certification as the sole criterion for selection.

Providing additional documentation to support the outsourced translation is not a standard practice among the surveyed institutions, with only 46.66% of respondents reporting doing so. Reasons for not including additional documents as part of the translation package were on the whole split between concerns about document confidentiality and the belief that additional documentation is unnecessary.

When outsourced translation jobs involve confidential documents, institutions tend to take precautions. Nearly half of respondents (46.65%) reported informing their LSP about the confidential nature of the documents (as a signal for them to ensure the privacy of the job) and a significant proportion (33.33%) include a confidentiality clause in their contract with the LSP. Only a small percentage of respondents reported not taking any measures to protect the confidentiality of their documents.

### 3.8 Perceptions of translation

Two variables seem to affect the expected turnaround time for translation tasks. First, respondents reported that the urgency of the work influences the expected turnaround time to some extent. However, a more significant factor is whether the task is completed in-house or outsourced, with in-house translators facing greater time pressure (see Figures 10 and 11).



Figure 10: Expected turnaround time for 500 words (in-house work)

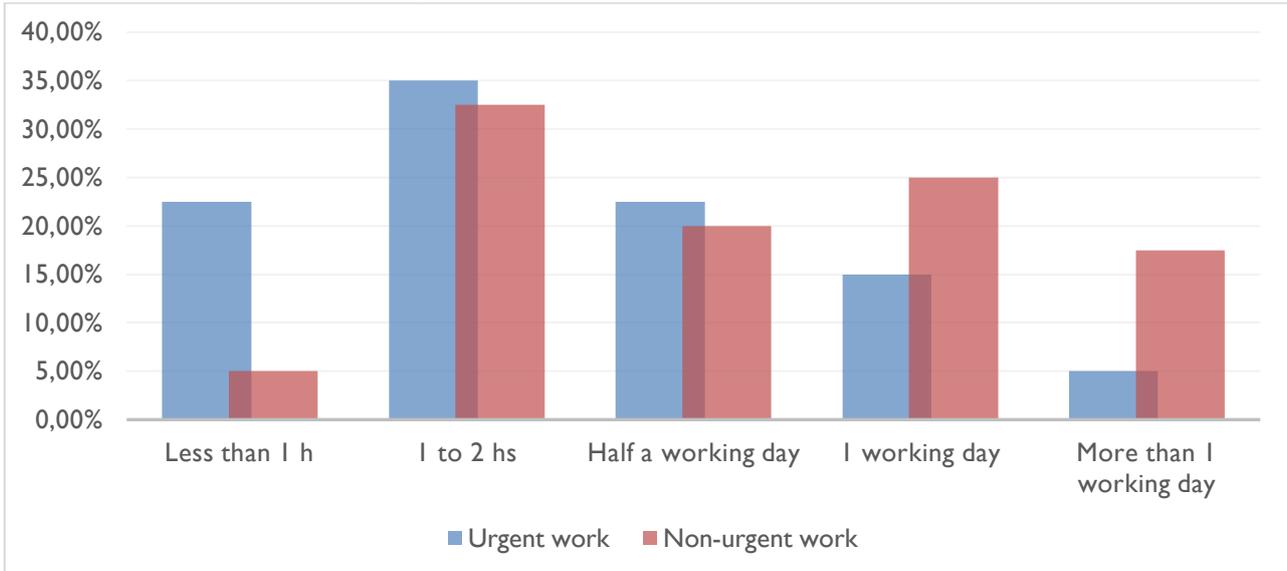
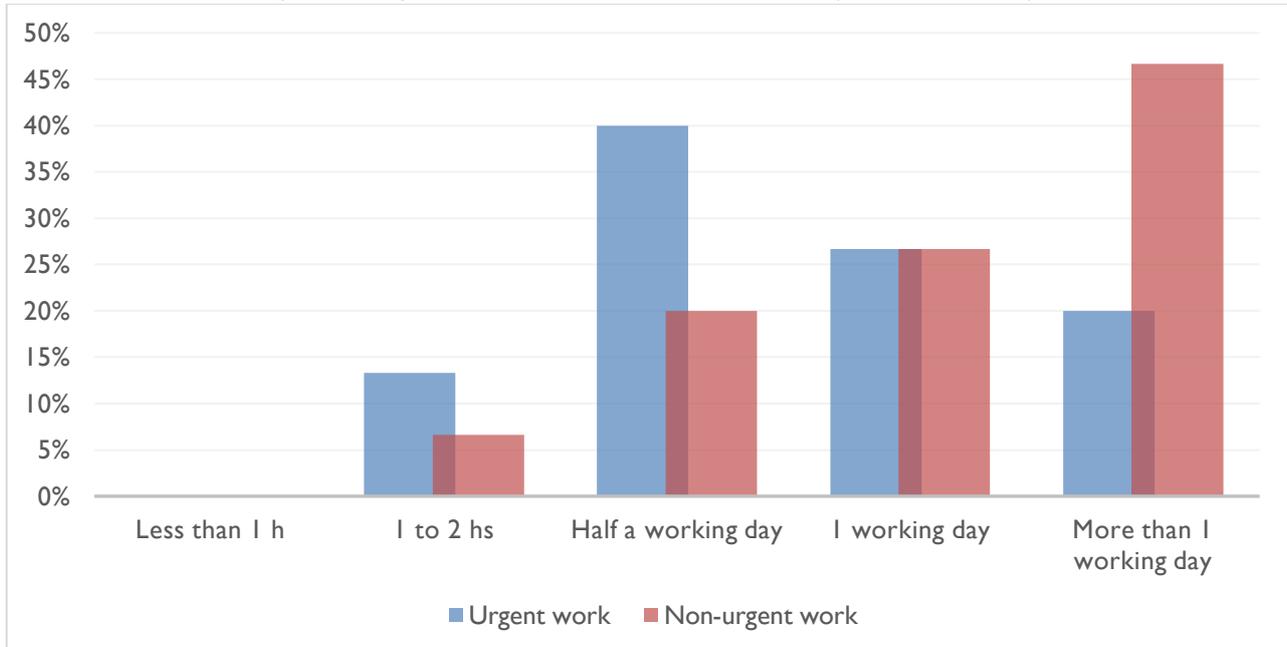


Figure 11: Expected turnaround time for 500 words (outsourced work)



The survey revealed significant insights into two important variables: perceptions of the importance of quality and translation difficulty. More than half of the respondents (52%) considered translation quality to be essential for their institution. Another 27.39% rated it as important, while a smaller percentage considered it to be of average importance (12.32%), unimportant (1.36%), or irrelevant (6.84%) to their institution. On the other hand, a majority of institutions (58.9%) rated translation as an activity of average difficulty, while the remaining institutions were equally divided between those who found it easier or more challenging. The analysis revealed a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.29$ ) between the importance attached to translation quality and how the difficulty of translation as a task was perceived. This may suggest that while the participating institutions

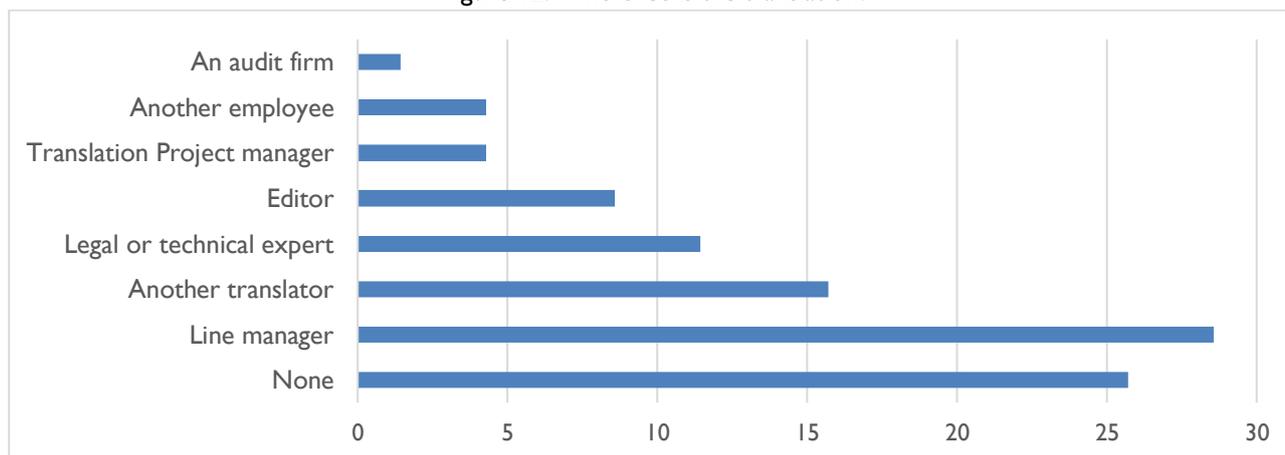
generally prioritize high-quality translation (average score 4.16 with a standard deviation of 1.14), they do not necessarily perceive it as a difficult task (average score 2.9 with a standard deviation of 0.83).

### 3.9 Quality assurance

Most participating institutions (almost 74%) do not have a company-specific internal glossary to facilitate the translation process. Among the remaining 26%, over half rely on a glossary in MS Word format, the other half is evenly split between those who use Excel files and those who make use of printed material. This indicates that in the majority of participating institutions, there is no proper terminology management policy.

A little under 75% of responding institutions reported having some kind of post-translation checkpoint in place. This stage is carried out by different agents within or outside the institutions (see Figure 12), depending on the institutions' nature, internal conditions, and translation practices. However, these results equally reveal that over 25% of institutions do not have any checking process in place.

Figure 12: Who checks the translation?



## 4. Discussion

Our study found that the context under scrutiny is characterized by the active use of multiple languages, with a significant bidirectional demand for translation services in various domains and genres. These findings are consistent with those reported by Al-Obaidani (2014) and Jamoussi and Shallal (2019) in the Omani context. They also align with previous studies conducted in different contexts (cf. Prieto Ramos, 2020a), indicating that institutions in various economic sectors provide fertile ground for translation activities. The similarity with other contexts is evident not only in terms of the size and variety of institutional translation needs but also in the translation practices employed to address them, including the adoption of in-house translation, outsourcing, or a combination of both.



The level of integration of translation within an institution's structure, policies, and practices, as well as the presence of norms associated with translation, are significant indicators of the institutionalization of translation (Koskinen, 2008, 2011). Conversely, the absence or limited presence of such a norms reflects an ad hoc approach by the institution towards its translation needs. This section aims to identify and examine these institutional norms or the lack thereof, thereby directly addressing the main research question and its sub-questions.

#### 4.1 Staffing

Staffing serves as a significant indicator of the institutionalization of translation. Despite substantial variations, the general picture shows that translation needs are not properly addressed, as only over half of the institutions translating in-house were found to have dedicated translators, and only half of these translators had formal training in translation. Although this study is not about the quality of institutional translation, it can be assumed that the current staffing situation is bound to adversely impact the translation output. Staffing is understandably dependent on an institution's size and translation needs, with larger institutions more frequently affording larger and dedicated translation teams. However, the fact that over 20% of institutions with constant translation needs do not have full-time translators clearly shows the limitations in staffing. This situation echoes what has been reported in the Czech context where it was found that “governmental translation units are rather limited in terms of human resources” (Svoboda, 2018, p. 22).

On the positive side, the minority of translation degree holders for whom translation tasks represent only part of their professional involvement in their institutions suggests that the additional skills and knowledge that these degree holders possess, beyond the immediate requirements of translation work, are also valued by their employers. However, it is important to note that this specific case remains marginal and does not alter the overall findings on staffing, suggesting that a majority of the surveyed institutions do not consider translation as a core aspect of their operations or lack a systematic approach to managing their translation needs, which in turn suggests a lack of institutionalization of translation practices among the majority of participating institutions.

#### 4.2 Resources

Access to various essential resources is crucial for the successful completion of the translation process. These resources may include relevant source materials, appropriate technologies, and adequate time allocation. The results indicate a limited availability of translation-specific resources, combined with the sole reliance on monolingual technical documentation and in-house experts. These findings, which directly address one of the research sub-questions concerning procedures governing translation within institutions, suggest that the participating institutions may not have a clear understanding of what the translation process entails in terms of resources.



### 4.3 Adoption of CAT tools

The use of CAT tools by an organisation can offer insight into its established processes for managing translation activities and, consequently, the degree of institutionalization of its translation practices. The use of such tools requires upfront investment in this technology, an accompanying professional development program, or the recruitment of personnel with an adequate profile to use this technology. All the above actions presuppose awareness of the quality and consistency benefits that such investments can bring. The findings indicate that only 12% of the institutions engaged in in-house translation, and 38% of those with constant translation needs reported using CAT tools. This situation has not changed significantly since 2016 (Jamoussi & Shallal, 2019), suggesting a lack of awareness of the benefits of CAT tools and ultimately a potential limitation towards institutionalization. Furthermore, many of the responses were found to refer to MT engines when asked about CAT tools, which suggests a general and limited awareness of the differences between these technologies and their potential applications. The results also suggest that institutions that employ translators with degrees in translation are more likely to integrate CAT tools into their workflows. This highlights the importance of formal translation training for the effective upgrading of translation procedures.

### 4.4 Workflow

Workflow relates to the processes “involved in achieving target language content” (ISO 17100:2015)<sup>1</sup>. According to the survey results, when multiple people are assigned to a translation task, the typical workflow is often organized around the sharing of the translation workload, with no trace of dividing tasks into separate stages. This means that team members often divide a lengthy document into sections, and each translates one part, while also managing terminology and other aspects of the translation process, rather than allocating to separate members each of the pre-translation, translation, and post-translation stages in a sequential manner. While this type of workflow demonstrates collective effort, a feature of institutional translation (Schäffner, 2018, p. 206), it lacks the necessary sequential organisation, which is key for effective translation and particularly the adoption of CAT (Drugan, 2013, p. 82, 102-107). Not following this workflow is another indication that the context is generally ill-prepared for the adoption of CAT, or is at least not taking full advantage of the benefits of this technology. More broadly, the lack of defined translation workflows indicates a limited level of institutionalization of translation, potentially resulting in inefficiencies in the translation process.

### 4.5 Quality assurance

Consistency checking, revision, review, and proofreading are integral parts of the project management process (ISO 17100:2015). They represent an even more crucial stage when the translation is performed by more than one person. Although not generalized, some kind of post-translation process appears to be common. In our context, this task was typically assigned to senior

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<sup>1</sup> ISO standards are reviewed every five years. ISO 17100:2015 is still current as it was reviewed and confirmed in 2020.



managers or technicians. However, about a quarter of the institutions do not carry out any checking. In addition to the very rare use of institution glossaries or style sheets, the situation shows that this checking process remains subjective, providing another indication of the lack of integration of translation processes into the institution. These results on the lack of rigorous linguistic quality control in translation in professional settings seem to echo the findings in other contexts (e.g., Drugan, 2013; Svoboda, 2018; and O'Hagan, 2013 in the context of an intensive use of technology). The question of translation quality assurance is closely tied to two crucial elements: workflow procedures and stakeholder involvement. These factors serve as indicators of the level of institutionalization of translation practices. The results in this area paint a nuanced picture, suggesting that there is room for improvement.

#### 4.6 Use of MT

While the use of MT in institutional translation has been a topic of debate, concerns have been raised regarding its integration into the translator workflow. Some of these reservations relate to its effectiveness with certain text types, output quality, and a range of other reasons on the potential impact on translators' performance and discomfort with the technology (Cadwell *et al.*, 2016; Cadwell *et al.*, 2018; Ehrensberger-Dow & Jääskeläinen, 2019; Nunes Vieira *et al.*, 2023). In our study, the attitude toward the use of MT varies substantially between unconditional adoption and total rejection and aligns with other situations described in the literature (see O'Hagan, 2013; Svoboda, 2018). The argument of output quality, prevalent in the literature, is equally present here, thought to a limited extent, and is similarly primarily couched in terms of its adequacy to different text types. More specific to our context is the concern over confidentiality. This specificity can be explained by the fact that the MT systems mentioned in the survey are free online services. This is different from the systems described in the literature, which are typically proprietary and internal (Cadwell *et al.*, 2016; Cadwell *et al.*, 2018), thus offering better security. In any case, the responses regarding restrictions and text selectivity on the use of free online MT engines, though limited in scope, imply the presence of norms, albeit unwritten, and, in turn, suggest a degree of institutionalization.

#### 4.7 Outsourcing

This study reveals that outsourcing practices are inversely proportional to the size of the institution. This finding aligns with the general profile of larger institutions as contexts where translation needs and the means to address them internally are available. Conversely, in smaller institutions, it is harder to allocate the human and logistical resources for a need that is generally less prominent.

Three key aspects of translation-outsourcing practices emerge. First, while some institutions establish long-term relationships with LSPs, there are often no formal procurement processes or long-term contracts to formalize these partnerships. Second, client satisfaction appears to be a crucial element in maintaining long-term partnerships with LSPs, with translation quality and fast delivery times appearing to be more important factors than translation rates. Third, the study found



that over 53% of the institutions surveyed only provided source files without additional supporting documentation, when in fact best practices are expected to involve providing a “translation kit” that includes, in addition to source files, reference documents, glossaries, style guides, translation memory files, and other relevant materials to facilitate accurate and consistent translations by LSPs (ISO 17100:2015). These findings underscore limited awareness regarding the requirements of translation outsourcing, which inevitably impacts the effectiveness of the process and the quality of the final product.

#### 4.8 Expected translation turnaround times

The study findings indicate that the expected turnaround times for translation can vary substantially and are comparable in this regard to other contexts (Svoboda, 2018. See also Terribile, 2023). Given the industry standard of an average of 250 words per hour for an experienced translator, the study reveals that in-house translation can be undertaken within an extremely tight schedule, especially when it is considered urgent. The situation for outsourcing scenarios is not better. Although expectations may seem more lenient, once the additional paperwork handling times such as feasibility, quotation, agreement, etc. are factored in, any margin for leniency compared to in-house translation practices disappears. These findings clearly indicate a limited understanding of the effort required in the translation process. Such an attitude can significantly impact the quality of the translation output.

#### 4.9 The overall view

The broad picture emerging from the study is that, similar to other contexts (Kang, 2014), translation practices are not uniform or homogeneous. Whether in in-house or outsourcing scenarios, translation is generally characterized by ad hoc practices. However, contexts of occasional outsourcing demonstrate a comparatively higher level of institutionalization. Occasional outsourcing suggests the presence of criteria and mechanisms that determine when to switch between in-house translation and outsourcing, which in turn reflects an awareness of some of the challenges inherent in the translation process and the importance of adhering to translation standards. For example, some institutions were found to shift from in-house to outsourced translation when the document to translate reached a specific size, or when the text's domain or one of the languages involved was outside the competence of in-house translators. Interestingly, our results did not show any evidence of confidentiality as a criterion for deciding whether the text should be processed in-house, in contrast to what has been observed in other contexts (Gouadec, 2007).

The significance of translation quality is evident in the surveyed context, from various perspectives. First, it is emphasized directly as an independent survey item. Secondly, it is considered a crucial factor in the selection of LSPs in the case of outsourcing. Lastly, some organisations underscore its importance by employing rigorous testing procedures for the recruitment of translators. These findings align with the general recognition of the impact of translation quality of business (see for instance Araghi *et al*, 2023). However, the study reveals that there is no strong positive correlation between the importance given to translation quality by the participating



institutions and their perceived difficulty of translation. Thus, a significant number of institutions view translation as a straightforward task that requires nothing more than language or domain expertise. This lack of awareness of the complexities involved in the translation process and the professional standards required for high-quality translations ultimately explains the quasi-absence of systematic and institutionalized translation practices within these organisations. In turn, this attitude impedes the recognition of genuine translation needs and the allocation of sufficient resources to address them. Consequently, it poses a potential obstacle to the efficiency of the translation process and the quality of the final product.

Although we took great care to ensure the validity and reliability of our findings, we acknowledge a number of limitations in this study. First, it is important to note that the sampling method employed in this study does not allow for generalizations regarding the unique characteristics of each institution category. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the diverse range of practices and perspectives within different types of institutions. However, as an initial investigation, this study offers valuable preliminary insights into translation within institutional contexts. By identifying major challenges and opportunities associated with this activity, the study lays a foundation for future research in this area. Further qualitatively oriented investigation is needed to fully understand the reasons for the observed trends and attitudes. Furthermore, investigation could focus on assessing the quality of translation output within these contexts to understand the impact of observed practices. This direction has been explored by numerous projects in the literature (see for instance Biel, 2014; Choi, 2020; Fischer, 2010; Gagnon, 2021; Gagnon & Kalantari, 2017; Kang, 2007; and Tcaciuc & Mackevic, 2017). In addition, the findings need to be integrated into a more encompassing investigation of the economic weight of the translation sector (see Lavault-Olléon, 2011) and of the ways it will react to the latest developments in artificial intelligence. Second, the study did not address interpreting needs. These were not included due to the risk of affecting the number of respondents with a longer questionnaire. Anecdotal evidence clearly indicates that interpreting needs are significant, and we believe that this topic deserves an independent investigation.

A comparison with previous research findings in the same context (Al-Obaidani, 2014 and Jamoussi & Shallal, 2019), indicates minimal change over time, highlighting the pressing need for action. This may involve introducing legislation, either at the institutional or national level, to address translation practices within the broader framework of language management in multilingual contexts. Such legislation would set norms and provide a foundation for improving practices.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study aimed to shed light on the degree of institutionalization of translation practices outside dedicated LSPs in Oman. This overarching objective was expressed into specific research questions that examined various aspects of the translation process. Using an online questionnaire as an instrument, the study revealed a context with substantial communication and translation needs, but with limited institutionalization of translation practices. These limitations appear at various levels, including the number and profile of employees tasked with translation, absence of collective processes, scarcity of style guides and translation manuals to harmonise



translation, mixed revision processes, and limited utilization of technology. The ad hoc approach emerging from the investigation points to a lack of awareness of the complexities involved in the translation process and the professional standards required for high-quality translations. Interestingly, most indications of an emerging institutionalization of translation are located in contexts where both in-house and outsourcing scenarios coexist. In these contexts, the decision to use either of the alternatives relies on an existing set of norms, albeit unwritten, that consider criteria such as length, challenge level, and domain and language competence. Given the widespread use of translation within institutions in Oman, the significance of upholding high-quality standards cannot be overstated. Failure to do so could adversely affect efficient communication and overall functionality, extending beyond the scope of individual institutions. The introduction of institutional and national-level legislation addressing language management in multilingual settings is seen as the best recommendation to address the current situation.

This study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in translation practices and can serve as a foundation for institutions to improve their translation processes and meet their translation needs more effectively. More broadly, the study highlights the importance of institutional translation within the broader context of the language industry. Often overlooked in research, this project underscores the significance of examining this specific aspect of translation, indicating a need for further attention and investigation.

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## Appendix: Survey Questions

Please note that the online survey applied branching, which means that respondents ended up answering different sets of questions depending on responses to specific items.

1. Is the institution you belong to public or private?
2. Is the institution you belong to national or international?
3. Does your institution directly deal with partners outside Oman?
4. Please identify your institution sector.
5. What is the size of your institution? (Up to 10 employees, between 11 and 50 employees, 51 or more employees)
6. What is the official language of communication in your institution?
7. Does your institution receive or send documents and emails in languages other than the official one?
8. How do you describe translation needs in your institution? (Extremely rare, rare occasional, frequent, constant)
9. Are these translation needs bigger for incoming or for outgoing documents?
10. In your institution, what types of documents need translation? (You can select more than one option)
11. Are these documents confidential?
12. How does your institution usually deal with translation needs? (Documents are translated within the institution, Our translation needs are outsourced, We usually translate internally but we occasionally outsource translation tasks.)
13. In what circumstances do you outsource translation tasks? (open-ended)
14. How many employees are regularly or occasionally assigned translation tasks in your institution? (1, 2, 3, more than 3)
15. How is the translation activity organized? (Each employee is responsible for all translation stages from beginning to end, The preparation, translation, and revision stages are undertaken by different people.)



16. Do employees sometimes share the translation of a single document?
17. How is consistency ensured when a document is translated by more than one person? (We do not need to check. We trust our translators for the quality of their output, The translated document is re-assembled and goes through another round of checking, Our translators use a common glossary for the translation, Other)
18. How do you describe employees who translate in your institution? (They are full-time translators. This is their job title in the institution, Occasional translators. They were not recruited as translators.)
19. Do these employees have a degree in translation?
20. On what basis are non-translation specialists selected to perform translation task? (Their knowledge of the institution, Their good language skills, Their familiarity with the domain, All of the above, Other)
21. Why does your institution rely on non-specialists for its translation needs? (Translation tasks are easy and can be performed by whoever speaks the two languages, Hiring translation professionals is costly, Translation agencies are slow, Translation agencies are expensive, Other)
22. Does the institution provide dictionaries the translators can use?
23. Are translators in your institution allowed to consult company documentation for translation support?
24. Are there company glossaries the translators can use?
25. Are translators in your institution allowed to consult other staff on particular details in the document they are translating?
26. What Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) solution does your institution use?
27. Is the use of online Machine Translation services such as Google Translate allowed in your institution?
28. Why is the use of online machine translation not allowed? (The translation quality is not good, We have concerns over confidentiality, Other)
29. For what types of texts is machine translation tolerated? (Open-ended)
30. What measures are taken when the document to translate is confidential? (None, We bring the translator's attention to this fact Other)
31. Why does your institution prefer to sub-contract translation jobs instead of doing the translation in-house? (We do not have the qualified personnel for translation, Our translation needs are small, Other)
32. Does your institution always deal with the same translation provider for your translation needs?
33. Does your institution have a long-term translation service contract with a specific translation service provider?
34. Does the translation subcontracting go through a bid/tender?
35. What criteria are used for the selection of your translation service provider? (You can select more than one option) (Competitive prices, Translation quality, Speed of delivery, Recommendation from another company, Satisfaction with previous jobs, Other)
36. In addition to the document(s) to translate, do you provide your translation service provider with further documentation to help in the translation?
37. Why is further documentation not provided? (Company documentation is confidential, Our translation service provider never asked for further documentation, There is no need for further documentation. The translation service providers know their job, Other)
38. What documents do you provide your subcontracting translation service provider with? (You can select more than one option) (Company glossaries, Company documentation, Translation Memory files, Other)



39. What measures are taken when the document to translate is confidential? (None, We inform the subcontracting company about it, Our contract with the translation provider contains a confidentiality clause, Other)

40. What deadlines are normally allowed in your institution for a translation task of 2 pages (about 500 words), when it is not urgent? (Less than one hour, Between one and two hours, About half a working day, About one working day, More than one working day)

41. What deadlines are normally allowed in your institution for a translation task of 2 pages (about 500 words), when it is urgent? (Less than one hour, Between one and two hours, About half a working day, About one working day, More than one working day)

42. In your institution, is translation considered an easy or a difficult task? (5-point Likert scale from Very easy to Very difficult)

43. Is good translation considered important for the working of your institution? (5-point Likert scale from Irrelevant to Essential)

44. How are documents usually sent for translation? (By email, On a flash drive, As a hard copy, It depends.)

45. What does this depend on? (Open-ended)

46. Does your institution have a local glossary of terms specific to it?

47. In what format is this local glossary? (MS Word, MS Excel, Other)

48. Does your institution have a style guide or translation manual?

49. Who usually checks the translation after it is performed/received?

50. What translation practices are usually avoided in your institution?

51. Do you have other details about translation practices in your institution you wish to communicate?

## Notes

## Authorship contribution

**Conceptualization:** R. Jamoussi, A. Al Zahran,

**Methodology:** R. Jamoussi, F. El Karnichi

**Data collection:** A. S. Al Saidi

**Data analysis:** R. Jamoussi

**Results and discussion:** R. Jamoussi

**Review and editing:** R. Jamoussi, A. Al Zahran

## Research dataset

Can be provided upon request.

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## Image copyright

Not applicable.

## Approval by ethics committee

This research project obtained ethical approval from Sohar University.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this work.



## Data availability statement

The data from this research, which are not included in this work, may be made available by the author(s) upon request.

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## Section editors

Andréia Guerini – Willian Moura

## Technical editing

Alice S. Rezende – Ingrid Bignardi – João G. P. Silveira – Kamila Oliveira

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