

## Where do translation students go? A study of the employment and mobility of Master graduates

Yu Hao & Anthony Pym

To cite this article: Yu Hao & Anthony Pym (2022): Where do translation students go? A study of the employment and mobility of Master graduates, The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, DOI: [10.1080/1750399X.2022.2084595](https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2022.2084595)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2022.2084595>



Published online: 02 Jun 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 660



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

ARTICLE



# Where do translation students go? A study of the employment and mobility of Master graduates

Yu Hao  and Anthony Pym 

School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

## ABSTRACT

Faced with technological disruption, the employability of translation graduates demands careful analysis. Interpretations of major previous surveys suggest that only about one third of graduates find employment as translators or interpreters, although about half of them tend to find employment using multilingual communication skills in various capacities. This reality check has major implications for any attempt to adjust training programmes to the demands of translation companies: it becomes very important to assess the wider range of jobs and the transferable skills that they require. A survey of graduates from the Chinese-English Master of Translation at the University of Melbourne offers detailed insight into the wider range of employment but differs from previous surveys in two respects. First, the international mobility of students means that multiple national differences have to be taken into account. And second, the 20% of graduates that undertook further study after the Master justifies part of the training being to meet the criteria of academic institutions. These two aspects may be generalisable to other training programmes and should help revise the way curricula are conceptualised.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 May 2020  
Accepted 28 May 2022

## KEYWORDS

Translator training; graduate employability; mobility; Chinese-English translation

## 1. Introduction

In an age where 99% of translations are reported as being mediated by machines (Liu 2020), the human translator may appear to be under threat. Increasing attention is thus being paid to the relation between translator training and employability. Numerous studies address the issue by drawing on the opinions of those who employ professional translators (for example, Toudic 2012; China Academy of Translation and Translators Association of China 2016; Horbačauskienė 2017; Schnell and Rodríguez 2017). Those studies are based on the normalising assumption that all graduates are actually seeking employment in translation companies. On the other hand, there are rather fewer studies that attempt to trace where translation students actually go after graduation (mainly Torres-Hostench 2012; Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2016; Toudic 2017a; 2017b). Those studies regularly show that most graduates from translator-training programmes do *not* find employment as professional translators; in fact, the trend could be that the number of professionally employed translators is around one third of all graduates. This

finding should question the initial assumption made by the studies based on the opinions of employers; it might thereby raise further questions about the meaning of ‘employability’ in relation to translator training.

Here we seek to review briefly the available literature on where translation graduates go. We then compare what seem to be the general trends with our own survey of translation graduates from the University of Melbourne, Australia. We will finally propose some tentative consequences for the way we think about translator training.

## 2. Prior studies of where translation graduates go

Many translator-training institutions conduct surveys of graduate employment but do not make the results public: the surveys are primarily intended for internal use. Nothing suggests that non-publication is because there is anything scandalous to hide: one of the survey systems we have known personally tracks the annual employment and salaries of alumni and regularly produces very impressive numbers that can be shown to prospective new students. The few surveys that we do find published or reported on publicly are remarkably few in number and are rather difficult to put together, given that some refer to undergraduate training (the studies from Spain), others to postgraduate training (those from the European Masters in Translation, EMT), some include interpreting (Conférence Internationale Permanente d’Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes, CIUTI), others do not (EMT). Here we will nevertheless attempt to make these surveys speak to each other.

Torres-Hostench (2012, 789) compares data from four surveys done between 1999 and 2003 on the employment of graduates of first-degree programmes in Spain, from what might now be considered a different era (machine translation was not a major market factor in the 1990s). The percentages of former students employed in ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ (the two categories combined) were as follows: 27.4% (87 graduates in the sample, 2001), 34.2% (136 graduates, 2003), 38% (121 graduates, 1999) and 86.6% (314 graduates, 2003). The radically different figure of 86.6% comes from the number of graduates who said they had ‘worked as a translator’ at some point since graduating. But since the 321 respondents gave a total of 648 replies (more than two jobs per respondent) (ANECA 2004, 64), the numbers actually add up to 296%. This means that ‘translation’ was actually in 29.25% of the jobs mentioned, which seems far more in tune with the other surveys. That said, there is a serious message to be retained from the 86.6% figure: translations can be done by people in many different types of employment, many of them quite different from full-time in-house mono-occupational jobs.

We move on to two more recent and rather larger studies. In 2016, a survey carried out by the European Masters in Translation (EMT, reported in Toudic 2017a; Toudic 2017b),<sup>1</sup> gathered data on the employment of graduates from EMT programmes, eliciting 1,722 responses from 22 countries. The EMT report states that some 53% of the graduates were employed in ‘language services (translation, localisation, interpreting, language training, etc.)’, which means the cake has been cut so as to make it difficult to see the percentage actually employed in translation alone.<sup>2</sup> Within that 53% (1,062 respondents), there were some 374 graduates whose job title included the term ‘translator’ (interpreting was not mentioned in the question): just under 22% of the total respondents. If that sounds too disheartening, we might add all those who use translation skills of some kind:

106 translation project managers (which sounds like rather a lot), 96 revisers/reviewers, and 53 localisers, giving a grand total of 629 translation professionals or 36.5% of the total respondents. This fits in nicely with the kinds of numbers seen in the Spanish surveys. Indeed, the concurrence is all the more remarkable because the Spanish numbers are generally based on undergraduate training rather than Master programmes. The important point, though, is that we once again find there is one kind of figure for something like translation as a clear occupation (hovering around a third of the sample) and then a higher percentage for the diffuse penumbra of jobs associated with translation or possibly combined with it.

The second major survey was carried out in 2014 by CIUTI (Conférence Internationale Permanente d'Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes, reported in Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2016). This survey asked 97 questions of more than 2,600 people who had graduated in the 10 previous years from CIUTI institutions in 19 countries. The report makes it clear that the alumni had all graduated from 'university translation programs whose educational quality had been objectively tested and proven to be outstanding' (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2016). One would thus expect signs of quality employment. The results do indeed appear to be outstanding. In the slides presented to the CIUTI General Assembly in Shanghai in 2014 (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2014), we find the question, 'Would you describe your main current occupation as translation and/or interpreting-related?', to which a remarkable 78% of the respondents (1,287 graduates) replied in the affirmative. This number nevertheless needs to be interpreted. If the survey went to 2,813 graduates (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2014, 5), the 1,287 who had a 'translation or interpreting-related occupation' were more like 45.75% of the entire number of respondents (not just those who answered this question) and the question only concerned activities that were 'translation and/or interpreting-related', not whether the employment was as a translator or interpreter. We then find that, when asked 'What is your main occupation?', 616 of those translation or interpreting-related workers said they were mainly translators and 244 said they were mainly interpreters. Together, those 860 graduates make up 30.57% of the reported total respondents to the survey, which concords quite nicely with the results of the previous surveys, or possibly 44.23% of the respondents who were answering that part of the survey, which is very respectable but still less than half.<sup>3</sup>

These studies thus suggest – at least on our tentative interpretations – that about a third of graduates might find main-job employment as translators and/or interpreters, and as many as half of them find employment where translation and interpreting skills are required. Further, these rough proportions could apply to both undergraduate and graduate training, with or without interpreting.

If we are to enhance graduates' employability, we really have to know the relation between hard-core employment in translation and the range of jobs our graduates actually find. An important clue here comes from one further survey that is worth mentioning. The Zurich University of Applied Sciences (2020) conducts regular surveys of its graduates one year after graduation. The 2020 numbers for its translation and interpreting graduates (74 respondents) indicate that of 49 main jobs held, 16 are as translators or interpreters, which once again gives us about a third (32.6%).<sup>4</sup> This survey, however, also asked about the graduates' second jobs, of which 43.7% were in translation and/or interpreting, and then self-employment activities, where we find translation and

interpreting accounting for 95.2% of the activities mentioned, often with quite low proportions of a graduate's total activity. That is, in order to see how translation and interpreting skills are being used, we have to look into multiple job-holding or 'portfolio careers' and the reasons why translation and interpreting may not be providing stable full-time in-house employment.

This background provides some contextual comfort for what we have found at the University of Melbourne.

### 3. Where graduates from the University of Melbourne go

The Master of Translation was established at the University of Melbourne in early 2015. The programme includes three semesters and offers an optional fourth semester for a research thesis. It has two intakes each year and had a total of 135 graduates by the end of 2018 (one year prior to the survey). More than 90% of those graduates were native Chinese speakers.

Between 26 November and 3 December 2019, invitations to participate in an online survey were sent to the entire graduating cohort who had completed coursework study for at least one year ( $n = 135$ ).<sup>5</sup> The graduates were contacted through alumni networks, using a snowballing approach. We received a total of 77 complete responses from our graduates, giving a return rate of 57% (nine partial responses were excluded from our data-analysis). The majority of our respondents were female ( $n = 67$ ) and most were in their mid-twenties (mean = 26.52; SD = 2.72). Some 93.5% of them were L1 speakers of Mandarin Chinese ( $n = 72$ ); other first languages were Cantonese (3.9%,  $n = 3$ ) and English (2.6%,  $n = 2$ ). The majority had backgrounds in Arts and Humanities prior to the Master (78.8%,  $n = 63$ ), while others had studied Science and Engineering (7.5%,  $n = 6$ ), Management and Commerce (10%,  $n = 8$ ), or Law (3.8%,  $n = 3$ ). Developed on the Qualtrics website, the questionnaire survey sought information on the career paths of our graduates through a list of open-ended and closed-ended questions (see Appendix for specific questions), including the jobs our graduates went into, what kinds of employment they had been looking for, and their main reasons for not working on the translation market, when indeed that was the case.

#### 3.1. Graduates' range of occupations

Given the relatively time-focus of our study (our graduates had been on the labour market for no more than three years, as opposed to ten years in the CIUTI study and five years for the EMT survey), we are looking at entry into the market rather than long-term career development.

Our 77 respondents listed a total of 114 jobs they had obtained since graduation; only three (less than 4%) had not been employed. Translation and/or interpreting jobs had been landed by 36% of the graduates, including translation services ( $n = 16$ ), interpreting services ( $n = 2$ ), or both ( $n = 10$ ).

Should we be worried that just over one third of our graduates had found work as translators or interpreters? The number would probably not be a great selling point in our publicity, but it does seem to be in the general ballpark of the previous studies. This, alongside the impact of mobility, should be cause for a rethink. If most of our graduates

**Table 1.** Graduates' occupations other than translation and language-related occupations.

Industry sectors	Occupations (15)
Journalism (1)	Journalist
Management (1)	Project manager
Banking and financial services (5)	Bank clerk
	Financial risk manager
	Business developer in the IT industry
	Investment consultant
	Business analyst
Administration (2)	Manager
	Administrative assistant
Legal services (2)	Lawyer
	Legal assistance
Air-traffic control (1)	Air-traffic controller
E-commerce (1)	E-commerce entrepreneur
Real estate (1)	Estate agent
Clothing retail (1)	Shop assistant

are not going to work as translators or interpreters, what kinds of things can we do? What kinds of claims can we then make about the transversal nature of the skills we help develop? It is in this context that we seek better information about the wide penumbra of jobs that surround translation and interpreting, either as alternatives or in combination.

Almost a third (32.5%,  $n = 25$ ) of our respondents had accepted non-translation occupations that required the use of language skills, mostly in language teaching. This is similar to the CIUTI survey, where the corresponding figure could be 32.7%,<sup>6</sup> and to the EMT survey, where it could be 33.68%.<sup>7</sup> We feel more or less at home.

The remaining 21 graduates either were employed in areas other than translation and language or had taken up further study. Table 1 shows the 15 occupations obtained that were in fields other than translation or language (not including the respondents who had undertaken further study).

Aside from translation and language occupations, graduates found employment in a wide range of sectors (see Table 1), all of which involve using language and may involve using a foreign language. It is worth noting that some of the graduates had had previous training and/or work experience in these fields prior to entering the Masters, or in other cases finished intensive pre-career training following the Masters.

### 3.2. Multiple job holding

Bearing in mind that the first cohort of the MA programme graduated in mid-2017, we assume the whole graduating cohort had a maximum of three years of work experience at the time of this survey. Some of the graduates had obtained several occupations either during the same period or within few years of graduating, as can be deduced from the fact that the 77 respondents reported a total 114 jobs (see Table 2).

Two thirds of the employed graduates reported being employed with just one occupation (67.6%,  $n = 50$ ). They are categorised under 'language teacher' (18.9%,  $n = 14$ ), 'language worker'<sup>8</sup> (14.9%,  $n = 11$ ), 'translator' (5.4%,  $n = 5$ ) and 'others' (28.4%,  $n = 21$ ), which includes both the graduates employed with occupations other than translation and language-related work (Table 1) and those who had taken up further study (Table 5).

**Table 2.** Multiple concurrent or sequential occupations, answered by 74 respondents.

No.	Careers	Number	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Others	21	28.4%	28.4%
2	Language teacher	14	18.9%	47.3%
3	Language worker	11	14.9%	62.2%
4	Translator-Interpreter-language worker	5	6.8%	68.9%
5	Translation-Language teacher	5	6.8%	75.7%
6	Translator	4	5.4%	81.1%
7	Translation-language worker	3	4.1%	85.1%
8	Translator-Interpreter	2	2.7%	87.8%
9	Translator-Interpreter-language teacher	2	2.7%	90.5%
10	Translation-Language teacher-others	2	2.7%	93.2%
11	Interpreter-others	2	2.7%	95.9%
12	Translator-Interpreter-language worker-others	1	1.4%	97.3%
13	Translation-Language teacher-Language worker-others	1	1.4%	98.6%
14	Translation-others	1	1.4%	100.0%

A minority group of the graduates in this single-occupation group worked as professional translators only. It is worth noting that all those who obtained interpreting work were always engaged in other occupations as well.

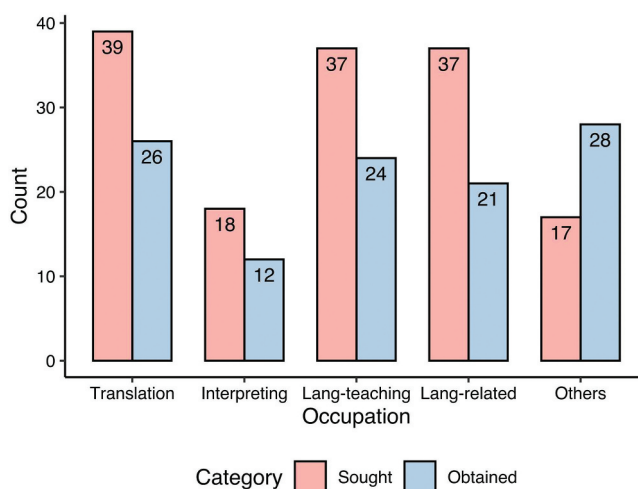
The graduates with multiple occupations reported various job combinations, including ‘translator-interpreter-language worker’ (6.8%,  $n = 5$ ), ‘translator-language teacher’ (6.8%,  $n = 5$ ), as well as ‘translator-language worker’ (4.1%,  $n = 3$ ). For example, a ‘translator-interpreter-language worker’ refers to a recent graduate who worked as a translator, an interpreter, and was employed in non-translation occupations requiring language skills, either simultaneously or sequentially. Two graduates worked as ‘translator-interpreter’ (2.7%).

In sum, within maximum three years of graduating, the translators and/or interpreters in our sample were more likely to work also as language teachers or language workers than simply provide translation and/or interpreting services.<sup>9</sup> This pattern may indicate that graduates had jobs without enough hours and/or pay to support themselves, which could be why they took up jobs in other occupations. The question can be investigated further.

### 3.3. Jobs sought and jobs obtained

Do graduates have multiple jobs because they *have* to or because they *want* to? We tested this indirectly by asking what employment our graduates had been looking for. They listed 148 jobs they had been seeking or were seeking at the time of the survey. The occupations sought and the occupations actually obtained are shown in Figure 1. For the areas of translation, interpreting, language teaching, and language-related occupations, the numbers of seekers clearly exceed the numbers of those who actually found employment. On the other hand, in the other fields there were fewer graduates initially seeking employment than those who were actually employed. This raises the question: Are the unsuccessful attempts to join the translation and language industry due to a low level of motivation to become a professional translator or interpreter in the first place, or are they due to major obstacles that prevent our graduates from obtaining those jobs? Both are possible reasons. For example, Li (2002) reported that more than 80% of the students chose to study translation in Hong Kong did so because they wanted to improve both





**Figure 1.** Occupations sought and obtained in five categories. ‘What jobs have you obtained since graduating? (You can choose more than one)’ by 73 respondents, who collectively gave 114 responses; ‘What kind of jobs have you looked for or are you looking for? (You can choose more than one)’ by 77 respondents who collectively gave 148 responses.

their Chinese and English, while only about 20% sought to become professional translators and/or interpreters. In that case, motivation would be the cause, rather than major obstacles in the labour market.

To address this question, we invited the graduates who did not enter the translation industry to list their main reasons for entering sectors other than translation and interpreting. A total of 120 responses were collected (see Table 3). The graduates most frequently indicate that translation and interpreting jobs are by nature unstable, temporary and casual (22%,  $n = 26$ ). This accords loosely with some general surveys of the sector.<sup>10</sup> ‘Not enough work experience to get a job in translation/ interpreting’ ranks highly (13%,  $n = 15$ ), which would suggest that graduates were either rejected by their potential employers because the translation market requires extensive practical experience, or they simply thought they did not have enough real-life experience and therefore did not apply for translation and/or interpreting jobs. ‘Further study’ (14%,  $n = 17$ ) and ‘personal factors’ (12%,  $n = 14$ ) are also common reasons. The remaining reasons concern the unavailability of translation jobs, including no suitable jobs in their local area (9%,  $n = 11$ ),<sup>11</sup> no jobs with suitable numbers of hours (9%,  $n = 11$ ), or no suitable jobs corresponding to their expertise (4%,  $n = 3$ ).

Fourteen of the 17 graduates who chose ‘other reasons’ further specified why they were not (only) working as translators and/or interpreters. Their responses can be grouped into three thematic categories: ‘Not enough money in translation’ ( $n = 3$ ), ‘Translation/interpreting as unstable occupations’ ( $n = 3$ ), and ‘Personal interest in other occupations’ ( $n = 8$ ). Three graduates with multiple occupations explicitly stated that they could not earn enough income to support themselves by doing translation and/or interpreting only. Three language workers



**Table 3.** Main reason for working in an occupation other than translation/interpreting.

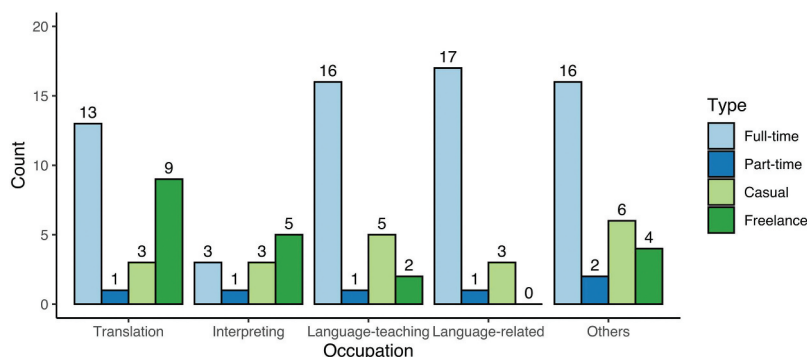
Reason	Frequency	Percentage
1. Translation/interpreting jobs considered temporary and casual	26	22%
2. Further study	17	14%
3. Not enough work experience to get a job in translation/interpreting	15	13%
4. Personal factors, e.g., caring for children or family members	14	12%
5. No suitable translation/interpreting jobs in my local area	11	9%
6. No translation/interpreting jobs with a suitable number of hours	11	9%
7. Cannot find a translation/ interpreting job	4	3%
8. No suitable translation/interpreting jobs in my area of expertise	4	3%
Other reasons	17	14%
Total	120	100%

indicated that they wanted a relatively stable career path and they chose language teaching and language-using work for this reason, since translation and interpreting are perceived as being irregular or temporary (concurring with Reason 1 in Table 3). The remaining eight graduates mentioned that they were simply interested in occupations other than translation and interpreting. For example, one of the graduates specified their reason: ‘Being an interpreter or a translator is not the kind of job that you can expect long-term growth or development in. The potential space for development is quite limited to a certain area. So I want to embrace a career that is more challenging and interesting.’ The other two indicated that language teaching best suits their interests and career plans: one aims to become a university lecturer and another is more passionate about teaching than translating.

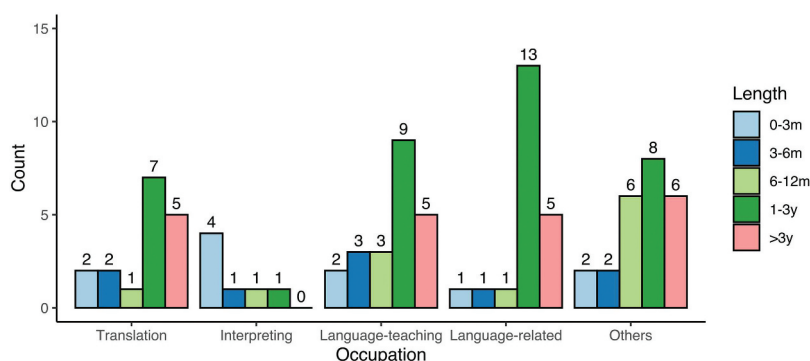
If we now return to the question of whether demotivation or industry hurdles account for the relatively low number of graduates that become professional translators or interpreters, the answer must be that the two factors are scarcely separable. On the one hand, we certainly find (as did Li 2002) that many students enrol in translation programmes more to improve their language skills than to become translators and interpreters, so their primary motivations were always already elsewhere. At the same time, we find a surprisingly negative image of the translation and interpreting profession, which is mostly far from a ‘dream job’ worth making enormous sacrifices to achieve. If there are industry hurdles, they are perceived as having more to do with low rates of pay, high work demands, and a lack of clear career paths. To that extent, a certain degree of demotivation might be interpreted as a dose of realism.

### 3.4. *Employment stability*

Figure 2 shows the stability of the five types of occupations in terms four types of employment: full-time, part-time, casual employment, and freelance. Overall, more than half the graduates who have worked as translators (50%,  $n = 13$ ), language trainers (67%,  $n = 16$ ), language workers (81%,  $n = 17$ ) and other professionals (57%,  $n = 16$ ) were full-time employees, whereas only a quarter of the professional interpreters ( $n = 3$ ) worked full-time. In each occupation category, part-time employees are the vast minority, with casual employees evenly distributed across the five categories. At the same time, freelancing was reported as a main employment type for translation (34%,  $n = 9$ ) and interpreting work (42%,  $n = 4$ ).



**Figure 2.** 'What type of employment do you have? (translation work/ interpreting work/ language teaching/ use languages for other purposes/ other jobs)' Numbers of responses by 74 respondents, who collectively gave 111 responses



**Figure 3.** 'How long is your work contract? (translation work/ interpreting work/ language teaching/ use languages for other purposes/ other jobs)' Numbers of responses by 74 respondents, who collectively gave 91 responses

We also measured six ranges of contract duration (Figure 3). While the length of interpreting contracts in most cases was less than three months, most employment contracts for translation (41%,  $n = 7$ ), language teaching (41%,  $n = 9$ ), language-related (62%,  $n = 13$ ) and other careers (33%,  $n = 8$ ) lasted for one to three years. For these four types of work, it was also common to hold work contracts of more than three years (translation: 29%,  $n = 5$ ; language teaching: 23%,  $n = 5$ ; language-related: 24%,  $n = 5$ ; others: 25%,  $n = 6$ ). Medium-term employment contracts, for example 6–12 months, were common for language teaching work and other occupations but not for others.

Table 4 illustrates the weekly working hours of the freelancers surveyed. Nine freelance translators worked for an average of 15 hours a week, five interpreters worked for eight hours, and two language teachers worked for 17 hours. Four respondents who work freelance in other occupations tended to work much longer per week. No one associated with the language-related positions was working freelance.

**Table 4.** Weekly working hours of freelance workers by employment category.

Employment Category (Freelance)	N	Min. (hr)	Max. (hr)	Mean (hr)	SD (hr)
Translation	9	0	56	15	21
Interpreting	5	1	21	8	9
Language Teaching	2	4	30	17	13
Language-related	0	-	-	-	-
Others	4	42	85	44	32
Total	20	0	85	18	24

**Table 5.** Area of further study for graduate pursuing an additional degree.

Further Study Degree	Frequency	Percentage
Research higher degree (PhD, MPhil)		
Translation/interpreting studies	5	28%
Education	1	6%
Masters degree		
Translation/interpreting studies	2	11%
Education	3	17%
Management and commerce	2	11%
Others	2	11%
Postgraduate certificate/diploma		
Translation/interpreting studies	1	6%
Others	1	6%
Total	17	100%

### 3.5. Further study

Over 20% of respondents had chosen to pursue further study, seeking another Masters degree, a higher research degree, or a postgraduate certificate or diploma (see Table 5). Of these, eight were continuing in Translation and Interpreting Studies, while some had side-stepped into Education, Management and Commerce, or others. Of those who continued studying translation or interpreting, five were pursuing a PhD degree in translation and/or interpreting, two were enrolled in a Master-level programme elsewhere, and one was studying for a postgraduate diploma.

## 4. Student mobility before and after graduation

The above analyses give us a fairly precise view of the kind of work that are graduates are looking for and finding. Before we seek to draw conclusions from the analysis, we must factor in one further variable: our graduates are not only working in several occupations, they are working in several countries as well.

When we ask where our graduates go, the answer has to be in a very physical sense: our graduates move between countries, in this case mainly China and Australia. This mobility seems to have not been asked about in the previous surveys.<sup>12</sup>

When the graduates were asked about their residence after graduation, some 83 responses were given, since some participants had lived in more than one city or town. Figure 4 shows the main geographical distribution of the graduates' residences. Most

respondents resided either in PR China ( $n = 45$ ) or in Australia ( $n = 34$ ). A few graduates ( $n = 4$ ) had migrated to countries other than Australia and China: they were in London, Dublin, Santa Clara, and Nairobi.

This distribution forces us to think a little differently from the previous surveys. We have to take into account a market that, although certainly not entirely global, stretches across two main countries.

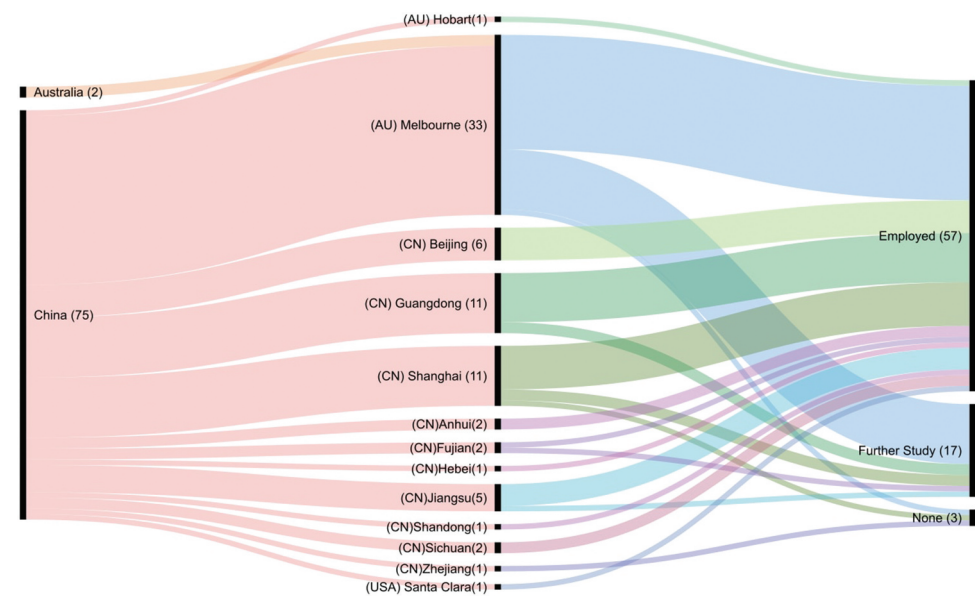
Figure 5 shows the countries the graduates originally came from, their residence after graduation, and the association of their mobility after graduation with their employment status. It indicates each respondent's primary residence after graduation (the first city or town in their responses), although some respondents provided multiple geographical locations – this is a mobile community.

As mentioned above, a total of 75 of the 77 graduates originally came from China, while two were domestic students from Australia. Both the Australian students stayed in Melbourne after the Masters. On the other hand, the mobility of the former students who were not Australian citizens seems to be more interesting. Over half (56%,  $n = 42$ ) reported they primarily lived in their home country after graduation, with a preference for three major cities: Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing; more than 40% (43%,  $n = 32$ ) stayed in Australia; and one person was in a third country (the United States). Of the



Not shown: Santa Clara, USA ( $n=1$ ), Nairobi, Kenya ( $n=1$ ), London, UK ( $n=1$ ), Dublin, Ireland ( $n=1$ )

**Figure 4.** 'In which cities or towns have you have lived since graduating from the Master?' 83 responses from 77 participants



**Figure 5.** Study mobility, mobility after graduation, and employment status, answered by 77 respondents.

**Table 6.** Graduates’ occupations in China and Australia (77 respondents).

	China (43 respondents)	Australia (34 respondents)
Translation and/or interpreting (28)	Translation (1)	Translation (3)
	Translation, Interpreting (1)	Translation, Interpreting (1)
	Translation, Language teaching (3)	Translation, Language teaching (2)
	Translation, Use of languages for other purposes (1)	Translation, Use of languages for other purposes (2)
		Translation, Others (including further study) (1)
Language related (25)	Translation, Interpreting, Language teaching (1)	Interpreting, Others (including further study) (2)
	Translation, Interpreting, Use of languages for other purposes (2)	Translation, Interpreting, Language teaching (1)
		Translation, Interpreting, Use of languages for other purposes (3)
		Translation, Language teaching, Others (including further study) (2)
		Translation, Interpreting, Use of languages for other purposes, Others (including further study) (1)
Others (21)	Language teaching (13)	Translation, Language teaching, Use of languages for other purposes, Others (including further study) (1)
	Use of languages for other purposes (9)	Language teaching (1)
None (3)	Others (including further study) (10)	Use of languages for other purposes (2)
	None (2)	Others (including further study) (11)
		None (1)

non-Australians who stayed in Australia after graduation, two thirds were employed in Melbourne (n = 19) plus one in Hobart, just under one third were pursuing further study

in Melbourne ( $n = 11$ ), and one was unemployed in Melbourne at the time of the survey. Of those who stayed in three major cities in China (37%,  $n = 28$ ), most were employed ( $n = 23$ ), with five graduates pursuing further study.

Of the Chinese students who obtained jobs after graduation, half were employed in the three major cities in China (51%,  $n = 28$ ) and a third were employed in Australia (36%,  $n = 20$ ). Over two thirds of those who continued study were pursuing another degree in Melbourne (65%,  $n = 11$ ), while the rest were studying in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and few other cities in China. Melbourne is thus the most popular destination for further study.

When we look at the occupations and combined occupations in terms of the two countries (Table 6), the one clear difference is that the graduates who return to China are far more likely to find employment in language teaching and uses of language for ‘other purposes’, whereas multiple jobholding is more frequent in Australia. We might surmise that translation graduates have little trouble selling their English skills in China, whereas their Chinese-language skills provide less of a fallback position in Australia.

## 5. Conclusions

The above analyses give us a fairly precise view of the kind of work that one set of graduates are looking for and finding: about a third in translation/interpreting, a third in language-related professions, a third in other things, with numerous combinations of those three. The degree to which the findings seem to generally concur with previous surveys leads us to believe that there are consequences to be drawn not just for our training institution, but for many of the institutions that find themselves in similar situations.

A first option runs as follows: If our aim is to see all graduates work as full-time translators or interpreters, then we have to change our intakes and curricula in order to achieve that aim. That would mean dismissing the surveys as signs of relative failure.

The basic alternative option would then be to accept that all gainful employment is good employment and that we should thus tailor our intakes and curricula so that a range of language-based occupations is being catered to. If we want to think in terms of that second option, there are several fundamental consequences:

- (1) *Provide training in job seeking:* All the surveys indicate that job-seeking can be a tough process: some graduates wait months or years before finding a stable position, and most tend to jump through several jobs quite rapidly. The CIUTI survey especially indicates that work placements during training play a key role in smoothing the transition, and EMT (2017, 11) includes a skill that begins ‘approach existing clients and find new clients ...’, which should also help when applying for a job. Job-seeking skills (interview techniques, preparation of résumés) are these days included in most of our programmes, but the graduate surveys suggest that we might want to check how they can best be adapted to actual experience.
- (2) *Conduct wider surveys:* If we are going to draw on employer surveys, then the employer sample should ideally aim to include *all* the sectors that are likely to give stable well-paid employment our graduates, not just the larger translation

companies or language-service providers.<sup>13</sup> This may mean conducting employer surveys by first contacting the businesses that graduates have entered, or by contacting businesses and finding out where they get their translations done. Unless alternative strategies like these are considered, we risk locking ourselves into a one-sector mindset.

- (3) *Identify transferable skills*: We should ideally use these survey instruments to identify and develop the skills that are most transferable to a range of language-based occupations.<sup>14</sup> This seems not to be a contentious issue: the revised competence model of the European Masters of Translation (EMT 2017), for example, emphasises interpersonal skills that are highly transferable. This can also be a matter of approach within our classes. For example, in addition to teaching students how to work with an advanced translation memory suite (Trados, for example), we should also teach them how to pick up, use and evaluate a wide range of software solutions, since the transferable skills are in the learning and evaluation of software in general, not its detailed application to translation. We also know that work with translation technologies, to continue the example, can involve a very wide range of skills including computer literacy, project management, terminology management, revision, reviewing, copyediting, and content localisation (cf. Pym 2013). Even when we know that the technologies will not be needed in many future jobs (Hao and Pym 2021), we can teach them in such a way that numerous transferable skills are acquired.
- (4) *Identify pertinent area studies*: When we know what kind of industry sectors our graduates tend to find employment in, we have a basis for deciding what kind of texts to specialise in and what kind of specialisations to offer. The lesson of mobility analysis, at least in our case study, is that these decisions are neither wholly local (we are not training for the Australian market alone), nor magically global (our graduates are not going all over the world or working in all industry sectors). This has been known for some time: in Monterey, California, a localist perspective might decide to focus on fishing (there is a great aquarium there) and IT (Silicon Valley is next door), but the selection of what kinds of areas to specialise in traditionally depends on the *language* students are working with: the teachers know that the job market for Russian, for instance, is very different from that for Chinese, and texts are selected accordingly. Specialisation also concerns the courses made available to students (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2016, 57). are quietly shocked that 45% of their sample of CIUTI graduates had had no training in ‘complementary subjects’ (*Sachwissen*) such as law or engineering. Graduate surveys might help support arguments about which area studies should be offered as electives at particular institutions. In our case, with only one language pair in operation, the graduate survey tells us we should be specialising in commerce and law and offering electives in how to teach (which we are doing).
- (5) *Do more than translate*: Extending the incorporation of transferable skills pertinent area studies, graduate surveys can help support arguments in favour of teaching our students to go beyond text-bound translation. This does not mean forgetting about advanced language and translation skills, but it should mean



incorporating them into promotional and managerial communication skills. This is not particularly new. Holz-Mänttari (1984) long ago identified ‘translatorial action’ as a wide range of activities that translators do as experts in cross-cultural communication, and the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT 2017, 2) recommends that, faced with advances in machine translation, translators: ‘should act as language services advisors or language consultants, advising their customers on the best approach to a particular assignment and explaining the benefits or drawbacks of certain translation methods’.

- (6) *Train for academic research*: To push the same logic a little further, if a sizeable number of our graduates are going on to do higher degrees, then training in research skills should be part of what we offer, even when those skills are not readily transferable to industry. This means that the writing of academic essays, for example, may make some sense in the training situation even when professional translators are rarely called upon to produce such texts. This might be more convincing than arguing, for instance, that a learning outcome like ‘critical thinking’ automatically entails a skill that is transferable to all forms of communication, which is a noble desire that is not always a major selling point when an employer seeks a graduate who can follow procedures. The academy can use graduate surveys to justify looking after its own, at least to some degree.
- (7) *Abandon disciplinary isolationism*: Finally, perhaps most contentiously, we should no longer seek to distinguish ourselves from language education, for example by insisting that translation requires a special type of language learning or is not a special application of bilingualism. Those arguments were needed when we were building an independent discipline, in independent departments and sometimes in independent faculties. These days, we should feel free to admit, not just that many of our graduates are going into language education, but also that translation (or the wider ‘mediation’) is one of the basic language skills and as such should be taught in *all* additional language learning (Council of Europe 2001, 43). But that, of course, is a much wider discussion.

All these points can and should be debated. But the arguments, for and against, should ideally be informed by hard data on where our graduates go.

## Notes

1. Our sincere thanks to Daniel Toudic for providing the report delivered to the EMT Network Meeting, Brussels 31 March 2017 and to Andrew Rothwell for provided the data extracted for his students in the United Kingdom, which has enabled us to follow the exact questions asked.
2. More detailed data on the 29 graduates from Swansea University in the sample (personal communication from Andrew Rothwell, 29 February 2020) help us understand some of the difficulties in interpreting the results. The Swansea results indicate that 67% of all the jobs obtained by the graduates were ‘translation-related’, which is a very high percentage. However, since one graduate had had more than five jobs, one suspects there might be different understandings of the word ‘job’: it could mean an ongoing contract or a one-off translation commission. The survey then indicates that 44.83% of the graduates work in ‘language services (translation, localisation, interpreting, language training, etc.)’, where ‘language training’ is somehow different from ‘education (language teaching in schools/

universities)', which is offered as a different option – but did everyone understand that? Then we see that just 27.59% of the graduates (eight respondents) say that 'translator' is the job title that best describes their current position. To this we might add the one project manager and perhaps the one translation tools manager, bringing the percentage up to 34.48%, which is what we might have expected.

3. If 30.57% sounds too low for the prestigious institutions, we could place the 860 translators or interpreters in the context of the 1,944 graduates who responded to the question 'Is your work language related?'. This makes the percentage of translators/interpreters 44.23%. The problem is then what one does with the 869 graduates who did *not* answer that question. As Pokorn (2016, 668) notes with respect a similar survey carried out in Ljubljana (not the CIUTI survey), if a survey is not obligatory 'very few graduates (in our case only 25 of them) decide to respond to it. Moreover, it seems that only those graduates who feel confident about their position are willing to answer and provide additional data on their further career.'
4. Our thanks to Gary Massey, Director of the Institute of Translation and Interpreting, for sending the data from the surveys.
5. Ethics clearance was received from the Human Research Ethics Committees, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne (Ethics Authorisation Number 1954388.1).
6. In Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller (2014) 1,278 graduates said they have a job that is 'translation and interpreting-related', of which 860 say their main job is as a translator or interpreter. This means that 418 graduates (32.7%) are in 'related' fields but are not mainly translators or interpreters.
7. In the EMT survey (Toudic 2017b), we take the 1,722 graduates who indicated their 'employment sector', of whom 1,138 worked in 'education' or 'language services (translation, localization ... )'. Of the latter 1,138 graduates, 558 worked as translators, project managers, localisers or translation-tool managers. This means that 580 (33.68% of the 1,722 graduates) worked in language/education fields other than translation.
8. Here the term 'language worker' refers to a person who is employed with non-translation occupations requiring language skills.
9. This degree of multiple jobholding appears to be much less than that reported in Katan's 2008 survey of 890 translators and interpreters (reported in Katan 2009), where some 69% of the respondents had a second role.
10. The comparable numbers here vary considerably. Pym et al. (2012) found that 74% of translators work freelance and about 60% work part-time. In the CIUTI survey (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2014), 64% of those in the translation industry report working as freelancers. In the EMT survey (Toudic 2017b), 25% of the respondents report being self-employed.
11. It is important to note that 55% of the language-service providers in China are in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong (China Academy of Translation, and Translators Association of China 2018), which means that seeking permanent work in one's hometown is unlikely to mean finding full-time in-house employment with these companies.
12. There might be a certain nation-based presupposition at work when, for example, the previous surveys assess the unemployment rates of graduates in terms of the unemployment rates in the countries in which the training programs are located (Schmitt, Gernstmeier, and Müller 2016, 60; Pokorn 2016, 669).
13. We note that in June 2019 China had 369,935 registered companies with language services, and just 9,734 companies with language service as the main business (China Academy of Translation and Translators Association of China 2019).
14. There seems to be no easy way to define the range of occupations where translation skills may be of use. Bond (2018) scoured LinkedIn for the job titles of people who work for language service providers, coming up with over 600 different titles, many of which do not include the word 'translation'. The advantage of a bottom-up approach based on real graduate employment is that we are forced to work with the actual job titles, rather than suppositions about where translation becomes something else.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## ORCID

Yu Hao  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1375-4544>

Anthony Pym  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9440-0886>

## References

- ANECA (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación). 2004. *Libro blanco. Título de Grado en Traducción e Interpretación*. Madrid: Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación.
- Bond, E. 2018. "The Stunning Variety of Job Titles in the Language Industry." *Slator*. <https://slator.com/features/the-stunning-variety-of-job-titles-in-the-language-industry/>
- China Academy of Translation and Translators Association of China. 2016. "2016 China Language Service Industry Development Report". Beijing.
- China Academy of Translation and Translators Association of China. 2019. "2019 China Language Service Industry Development Report". Beijing.
- China Academy of Translation, and Translators Association of China. 2018. "2018 China Language Service Industry Development Report." Beijing.
- Council of Europe. 2001. "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment." Accessed 10 May 2020. <https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf>
- EMT. 2017. "Competence Framework 2017." Accessed 13 August 2019. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/emt\\_competence\\_fw\\_k\\_2017\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/emt_competence_fw_k_2017_en_web.pdf)
- FIT. 2017. "FIT Position Paper on the Future for Professional Translators." Accessed 15 August 2019. <https://www.fit-ift.org/publications/papers/>
- Hao, Y., and A. Pym. 2021. "Translation Skills Required by Master Graduates for Employment: Which are Needed, Which are Not?" *Across Languages and Cultures* 22 (2): 158–175. doi:10.1556/084.2021.00012.
- Holz-Mänttari, J. 1984. *Translatorisches Handeln: Theorie Und Methode*. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.
- Horbačauskienė, J. 2017. "Translation Studies: Translator Training Vs Employers' Expectations." *Journal of Language and Cultural Education* 5 (1): 145–159. doi:10.1515/jolace-2017-0009.
- Katan, D. 2009. "Occupation or Profession: A Survey of the Translators' World." *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 4 (2): 187–209. doi:10.1075/tis.4.2.04kat.
- Li, D. 2002. "Translator Training: What Translation Students Have to Say." *Meta* 47 (4): 513–531. doi:10.7202/008034ar.
- Liu, H. 2020. "Foreword." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Language Industry Studies*, edited by E. Angelone, M. Ehrensberger-Dow, and G. Massey, viii–xi. London: Bloomsbury.
- Pokorn, N. K. 2016. "The Dictates of the Market. The Future of Profession of Translators and Interpreters in a Post-Socialist EU-Member State." *Journal of Siberian Federal University: Humanities & Social Sciences* 3 (9): 662–674.
- Pym, A. 2013. "Translation Skill-Sets in a Machine-Translation Age." *Meta* 58 (3): 487–503. doi:10.7202/1025047ar.
- Pym, A., F. Grin, C. Sfreddo, and A. L. J. Chen. 2012. *The Status of the Translation Profession in the European Union*. Luxembourg: European Commission.
- Schmitt, P., L. Gernstmeier, and S. Müller. 2014. "CUITI Survey 2017. PowerPoint Presented." Shanghai.
- Schmitt, P., L. Gernstmeier, and S. Müller. 2016. *Übersetzer Und Dolmetscher – Eine Internationale Umfrage Zur Berufspraxis*. Berlin: DBÜ Fachverlag.

- Schnell, B., and N. Rodríguez. 2017. "Ivory Tower vs. Workplace Reality: Employability and the T&I Curriculum—Balancing Academic Education and Vocational Requirements: A Study from the Employers' Perspective." *Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 11 (2–3): 160–186. doi:[10.1080/1750399X.2017.1344920](https://doi.org/10.1080/1750399X.2017.1344920).
- Torres-Hostench, O. 2012. "Occupational Integration Training in Translation." *Meta: Journal Des Traducteurs/Meta: Translators' Journal* 57 (3): 787–811. doi:[10.7202/1017091ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1017091ar).
- Toudic, D. 2012. "Employer Consultation Synthesis Report, OPTIMALE Academic Network Project on Translator Education and Training." Rennes.
- Toudic, D. 2017a. "Graduate Employment Survey. Report to the EMT Network Meeting." Brussels.
- Toudic, D. 2017b. "Maintaining Standards in a Changing Market: The New EMT Competence Framework. PowerPoint Presented." Prague.
- Zurich University of Applied Sciences. 2020. "AbsolventInnenbefragung Ein Jahr Nach Der Diplomfeier. MA Angewandte Linguistik: Vertiefungen Fachübersetzen Und Konferenzdolmetschen." Unpublished Document. Accessed 21 April 2020.

## Appendix. Graduate employment survey

### Personal details

1. Your name
- \*2. When was your first semester in the Master of Translation?
- \*3. Which Master did you complete?
  - o Master of Translation
  - o Master of Translation (Extended/Enhanced)
4. How old are you?
- \*5. Gender
- \*6. What is your first language?
  - o Mandarin Chinese
  - o Cantonese
  - o English
- \*7. In what area were your previous studies? (You can choose more than one):
  - o Arts and Humanities
  - o Science and Engineering
  - o Management and Commerce
  - o Law

### Employment or further study

8. In which cities or towns have you have lived since graduating from the Master?
- \*9. What kinds of jobs have you obtained since graduating? (You can choose more than one)
  - o Translation
  - o Interpreting
  - o Language teaching
  - o Use of languages for other purposes
  - o Others (including further study)
  - o None

Other jobs, please specify.

- \*10. What kind of jobs have you looked for or are you looking for? (You can choose more than one.)
- \*11. What type of employment do you have for your work?
  - o Permanent Full Time;
  - o Permanent part time;
  - o Casual;
  - o Freelance
- \*12. How long is your work contract?
  - o Less than 3 months;

- o 3-<6 months;
  - o 6-<12 months;
  - o 1-<3 years;
  - o More than 3 years
- \*13. How many hours do you work a week as a freelancer, on average?
- \*14. What is your main reason for working in a job other than translation? (You can choose more than one.)
- o Further study
  - o Personal factors (caring for children or family members)
  - o Not enough work experience to get a job in translation/interpreting.
  - o Translation/interpreting jobs are temporary/casual
  - o Cannot find a translation/ interpreting job
  - o No suitable translation/interpreting jobs in my area of expertise
  - o No suitable translation/interpreting jobs in my local area
  - o No translation/interpreting jobs with a suitable number of hours
  - o Other, please specify
- \*15. Which level of studies are you currently pursuing?
- o Postgraduate certificate/ diploma
  - o Master's degree
  - o Higher research degree
- \*16. In which specific field of education?
- o Translation and/or Interpreting Studies
  - o Management and commerce
  - o Electric Engineering
  - o Education
  - o Food, hospitality and personal service
  - o Natural and physical sciences
  - o Information technology
  - o Architecture and building
  - o Society and culture
  - o Creative arts
  - o Health
  - o Others, please specify

Note: \*, close-ended question