

Translations around us

The presence of translated text in the life of a university student

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Abstract

The paper reports on a diary study measuring the proportion of translations read daily. Statistics are available on translated literature and books sold, but less is known about other text genres. The research was conducted in Finland, and the respondents were university students in translation or foreign languages. Data was collected in the years 2007 to 2016 using a diary form in which respondents recorded (electronically or on paper) all texts they read during one single day. They were also asked to specify whether the texts read were translations or not, and how much time they spent on each text or text genre. The diary form also contained a column for comments. The analysed data comprises 366 text diaries. The results show that the average time spent daily using different kinds of texts is 6 hours 46 minutes, and the proportion of translations is 31%.

Keywords: translation of non-fiction, reception of translations, diary studies, reading habits

1 Introduction

This paper reports a study which aimed at gaining information on the translated texts we come across every day. Statistics are available on translated literature and books sold, but less is known about other text genres and their prevalence compared to non-translated texts. However, many texts and bits of written information used daily are translations: ingredients printed on food packages, subtitles on TV, texts on the user interface of our mobile device, etc. In officially multilingual countries, as well as in countries with languages of lesser diffusion, more translation obviously takes place compared to countries with more widely spoken languages. But to what extent are the texts that we come across in our daily lives translated and to what extent written in the language in which we read them? Are some texts more typically translations than others?

The research reported here was conducted in Finland, a bilingual country with two official languages (Finnish and Swedish). The analysed data consists of 366 text diaries where university student respondents, hereafter referred to as diarists, have reported the

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texts they have come across and read during one day. The findings shed light on what texts typically are or get translated, and on how much time the diarists spent daily with those texts. It also sheds light on the change that has taken place with the texts read in the 10 years during which data have been collected (2007 to 2016).

In this study, ‘text’ and ‘texts’ refer to any written information that people come across during a day. In other words, a text can be anything between a 500-page novel and a single word written on a traffic sign (“STOP”).

2 Starting point and previous research

The idea for a study on “Translations around us” came from Outi Paloposki in 2005 and was started with her collecting diaries from students in two universities in 2006 (Paloposki 2006, 2007). A similar activity was suggested as an exercise for students by Pym (2010: 87). In the diaries, Paloposki’s students listed all the translated texts they came across during one week. The results show a number of text genres that are typically translations: novels and subtitles (TV and cinema), package information texts (for food, cosmetics, detergents, etc.), usage instructions, newspapers and magazines, publicity, study-related texts, brochures, order catalogues, Internet pages, announcements on trains or in the subway, and religious texts (Paloposki 2006, 2007).

Somewhat earlier, Jukka Mäkisalo (2006) had conducted a diary study at the University of Joensuu (now the University of Eastern Finland). He collected reading diaries from students of translation (N=19) containing all the texts the diarists came across during one week. The diarists did not state whether each text was a translation or an original, but the estimate was made by Mäkisalo who calculated that the proportion of translated text was 44% (with 22% of text read in the original language and 34% of text not categorized; Mäkisalo 2006: 256).

For the study reported here, Leena Salmi combined the methods used by Paloposki and Mäkisalo and started collecting one-day diary data in a diary form with predefined categories in 2007. The collection went on until 2016 and comprises now altogether 366 analysed student diaries. Results of the early data (2007–2010) have been published by Vihonen and Salmi (2007) and Salmi (2010), and the data collected in 2014 to 2016 were analysed by Hanna-Maria Ratinen (2024) in her Master’s Thesis. In addition, the diary template from Salmi (2010), translated into Dutch, was used by Hanne-Lore Verwerft in Belgium in her BA and MA studies. In the BA study, the average proportion of translations among the Dutch-speaking diarists (N=41) was 27% (Verwerft 2011). This study consisted of one-day diaries collected from 25 students (25% translations) and from 16 non-students (32% translations). Verwerft continued the study in an MA project collecting three-day diaries from 16 non-students; in this data, the proportion of translations was 36% (Verwerft 2012).

2.1 Statistics available on translated texts

Statistics are collected on the books published, sold, and borrowed in public libraries by statistical offices (e.g. Statistics Finland), book publishers, book vendors, and libraries. For example, the Finnish Publishers Association releases Annual Statistics of all the book sales which it collects from its member publishers in Finland as well as annual lists of bestselling books' sales figures by category (Finnish fiction, translated fiction, Finnish children's and youth literature etc.). According to these bestselling book lists the proportion of translated literature sold in Finland between 2014 and 2023 has varied between 41 to 51.5% (Finnish Publishers Association 2024). Together with The Finnish Publishers Association, the Booksellers' Association of Finland has commissioned a series of studies since 1995 which examine how much an average person in Finland buys and consumes literature (Booksellers' Association of Finland 2023).

Information on the distribution of translated and imported cultural items in addition to books (films, TV programs, theatre plays etc.) can be collected from additional sources, as was done by Alexandra Assis Rosa (2006) for Portugal. In Finland, Finnpanel Oy, a company providing marketing research for TV viewing and radio listening, publishes a yearly summary of TV viewing in Finland in which it provides figures of how and how much people in Finland spend time on viewing TV and other streaming services (Finnpanel 2024).

Apart from literature, very few statistics are available on the variety of non-fiction texts. Some language services inside the EU publish annual figures of the number of pages their department has translated, e.g. the Directorate-General for Translation which provides language services for the European Commission reported 2,597,178 translated pages in total in 2023 and the previous annual reports show that the figure is growing (European Commission 2023). Statistics on translated pages are not collected on the private sector, but we know that the provision of translation and language services is a growing business. According to a CSA Research estimate, the size of the worldwide market for translation and localization services in 2012 was US\$ 33 billion, while in 2023 it had risen to US\$ 51,95 billion (Kelly & Zetzsche 2012; CSA Research 2023). This is another reason for conducting this study, to gain some information on the use of non-fiction texts in everyday life.

Finally, Statistics Finland publishes a Time Use Survey every ten years in which reading is one of the activities it measures (Official Statistics of Finland 2024). The most recent survey also examined the average screen-time, including digital reading, of people in Finland. The results showed that the daily screen-time for a Finn was in average 4 h 26 minutes, and for 15- to 24 year-old Finns, an age range in which most of the participants in this diary study belong to, 5 h 46 min. It is noteworthy that the latest survey took place at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Official Statistics of Finland 2023.)

3 Methods

Diaries are used as a method for collecting information on how people use their time, in order to study different sociological phenomena, or to “give a picture of socioeconomic change” in post-industrial societies (Gerschuny 2000: 19). In diary studies, the participants report their daily time use divided between different activities during a certain period of time (usually a day or a week).

According to Gerschuny (2000), there are basically two types of diaries: a structured diary with precoded categories, or an open survey instrument, with the times of the day printed in one column, and the different activities to be recorded by the diarist printed in (an)other column(s); interviews can also be used, although they are more time-consuming. Gerschuny (2000: 256) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different types of diaries: diaries with categories are easier to analyse but more difficult to interpret, as the diarist may not interpret the categories in the same way; predefined categories may also lead diarists to select only a part or particular aspects of their experiences; and open diaries yield richer data but may be more difficult to analyse, as the researcher has to make the classification. A frequently used approach with an open diary is to provide the diarists an example of a completed diary (*ibid.*).

Methodological criticism of diaries claims that they are onerous to complete, and for this reason the non-response rates are high, and that the accounts people give of their time use are constructed, as they are reported by the subjects, and not recorded and the time measured by the researcher (Gerschuny 2000: 254–55).

In this study, a diary with precoded categories was used, and the diarists were asked to keep the diary for one day only. In addition, as the diary keeping did not concern all the activities of the diarists during the day, but a part of them dealing with texts, it was considered justified to use predefined categories, as they would also remind the diarists of all kinds of texts, such as package texts, that they might not otherwise consider as texts. The list proposed by Paloposki (2007) was the starting point, but for the data analysed here, the diarists were asked to list all the texts they came across during one day, and also to note whether the texts were translations or not, in order to gain information on the proportion of translations compared to other texts. The diary form also contained a category that allowed the diarists to include texts for which they did not find a suitable classification elsewhere.

The diary form was provided in Finnish in an Excel worksheet, and an example of a filled-in diary was provided within the Excel file, together with a questionnaire on background information. For an example of a filled-in diary form translated in English (our translation), see Appendix 1. In the diary form, the participants were asked to specify the time they used reading each text or text category, as well as whether the texts were translations or not (yes, no or DK=do not know). Rows could be added to specify several different texts within one category. The table also contained a column for comments.

When originally defining categories for the diary in 2007, Vihonen and Salmi (2007) created a category labelled ‘electronic messaging’ which included SMS messages, chatting and e-mail, and considered Internet sites a separate category. Since then, the digital landscape has changed considerably: social media includes different kinds of applets that

can be used via the Web (on a computer, tablet or mobile phone) or on a mobile phone only. Therefore, changes to the names and the division of the categories have been made yearly from 2013 to 2016. Table 1 shows the changes made in the categories during the years. Same or similar categories are highlighted with using the same colour, and white background marks the categories that have not changed.

Table 1. Comparison of the categories used in the diary form.

2014	2015	2016
NEWSPAPERS	NEWSPAPERS	FICTIONAL LITERATURE
PERIODICALS	PERIODICALS	FACTUAL AND SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE
SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS	SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS	DICTIONARIES
LITERATURE	FICTIONAL LITERATURE	ADMINISTRATIVE TEXTS
SOCIAL MEDIA (Facebook, Twitter etc.; email, chat, and SMS)	FACTUAL AND SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE	SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS
INTERNET (other than above mentioned)	DICTIONARIES	PERIODICALS
USER INTERFACES (the language of software and mobile phone menus)	NEWS (for example news agencies' Internet pages)	NEWSPAPERS
PUBLICITY, brochures, and announcements etc.	BLOGS	OTHER NEWS (for example news agencies' Internet pages)
INSTRUCTIONS, user guides and package texts etc.	WEB FORUMS	OTHER FACTUAL TEXTS
SUBTITLES (TV, films etc.)	OFFICIAL INTERNET PAGES (informative texts; for example University, KELA, EU)	BLOGS
ADMINISTRATIVE TEXTS (documents, letters, forms etc.)	SOCIAL MEDIA apps (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr etc.)	WEB FORUMS etc.
OTHER WORK OR STUDY-RELATED MATERIAL	EMAIL	SOCIAL MEDIA texts (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr etc.)
OTHER (please specify)	SMS	PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS
	CHAT (for example WhatsApp)	USER INTERFACES (for example software and mobile phone menus)
	USER INTERFACES (for example software and mobile phone menus)	INSTRUCTIONS (user guides, signs, package texts)
	INSTRUCTIONS (user guides, signs, package texts)	PUBLICITY (brochures, billboards)
	PUBLICITY (brochures, billboards)	SUBTITLES (TV, films; via TV or online)
	SUBTITLES (TV, films; via TV or online)	LECTURE MATERIALS, lecture slides, Moodle
	LECTURE SLIDES	STUDY-RELATED TRANSLATIONS

	STUDY-RELATED TRANSLATIONS	OTHER WORK OR STUDY-RELATED texts
	OTHER WORK OR STUDY-RELATED texts	OTHER (please specify)
	OTHER (please specify)	

The diaries collected in 2007 to 2012 contained a column for specifying the type of reading, concentrated or scanning, copied from Mäkisalo’s (2006) study. In the end, this information did not turn out to be significant for the purpose of this study. In 2013, this column was changed to ask for information on the media, printed or electronic, on which the text was read.

As the diary keeping concentrates on *written* information, a certain amount of oral text that is translated is left out. Examples of such translations are announcements in public transport systems (e.g. announcements in Finnish, Swedish, and English in the Finnish trains) or dubbed speech on the radio and television. However, in order to be able to examine the proportion of translated text, it was decided to limit the study to written texts, as it would have been impossible to ask the diarists to list all the speech they hear during a day and specify whether it is translated or not.

4 Materials

The material analysed here consists of 366 student diaries that were collected as part of different courses within translator training or language programmes at the universities of Turku, Helsinki and Eastern Finland from 2007 to 2016. The number of analysed diaries is presented in Table 2 below. The collection consists of altogether 380 student diaries, but for reasons explained below in section 5, altogether 14 diaries were left out of the analysis.

Table 2. The number of analysed student diaries, yearly and by university.

University	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
University of Turku	24	28	23	18	42	51	29	13	17	26
University of Eastern Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	-	-	-
University of Helsinki	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	73	-	-

The diaries were collected as course assignments from different BA level translation or text-analysis-related courses, taught by Leena Salmi or her colleagues Marianna Sunnari at the University of Turku, and Minna Ruokonen at the University of Eastern Finland. The diaries from University of Helsinki were collected by Leena Salmi in connection to one lecture that was part of a course in translation studies.

Keeping the diary was one of the assignments needed to pass the course, but the diaries were not evaluated. The students were informed that their diaries were collected for

research purposes only, and that all results would be reported in fully anonymised form. The students were given instructions on how to fill in the diary during one lecture, and the instruction slides were available for them in the course materials in the virtual learning environment used in the course.

The diaries were handed in by the students through the virtual learning environment used on the course. The diary could also be handed in on paper, but only a small number of students did this. When received, the paper versions were scanned into PDF files, and each PDF or Excel file was saved with an alphanumeric code consisting of an indication of the university (University of Turku, University of Eastern Finland, or University of Helsinki), response year (from 07 to 16) and a running number given in the order in which the files were opened; for example, T1012 for the diary number 12 in 2010 from the University of Turku.

5 Analysis

As could be expected according to Gerschuny (2000), the diarists had different ways of interpreting the categories and thus of categorizing the texts. In these cases, the researchers had to decide on the category. The following classifications were made systematically, regardless of what the diarist had marked:

- dictionaries were from 2007 through to 2014 classified as ‘Scientific publications’ (although also appearing under ‘study-related texts’) and non-translations, and from 2015 onwards as ‘Dictionaries’ as per the new category (non-translations)
- newspapers were classified as ‘Newspapers’ (although also appearing under ‘Internet pages’)
- virtual learning environments were classified as ‘Internet pages’ (although also appearing under ‘study-related texts’ in 2014) and from 2015 onwards as ‘Lecture slides/materials’

In many cases, the student diarists commented that they were not sure of whether a text written in a foreign language (or L2) was a translation or not. This question appeared in connection with newspapers, scientific literature, Internet texts, social media (articles, blogs, status updates or chats written in a foreign language; see comments in Appendix 1), and from 2014 onwards with user interfaces which was in general a difficult text type for the diarists to recognize as an independent text category. Scientific books and articles are sometimes translations, but if the diarist had found no mention of this, they were not considered as translations. The same is true for blog texts and social media: writing in L2 may happen by translating thoughts first formulated in L1, but the diarist usually does not have evidence of this, and this may be unclear even to the writers themselves. Therefore, writing in L2 was considered as formulating thoughts directly in L2, and was not classified as translation.

All multilingual texts such as package texts for products were considered translations when at least two languages appeared. According to EU legislation, mandatory food information on alimentary products “shall appear in a language easily understood by the consumers of the Member States”, and “the Member States [...] may stipulate that the

particulars shall be given in one or more languages from among the official languages of the Union” (Regulation EU/1169/2011). According to Finnish legislation, this means Finnish and Swedish; Norwegian or Danish may be used instead of Swedish.

Newspaper texts are a more problematic genre as for defining whether they are translations, or to what extent they are translations. Translation taking place within different media has been the subject of research especially since 2005; see e.g. Conway and Bassnett (2006) or Davier and Conway (2019). Translation is present on several levels of the news process and “forms an integral part of journalistic work” (van Doorslaer 2010). A news text is also usually composed from several national or international sources, including feedback from experts as a result of “several translation and reformulation processes” (van Doorslaer 2012: 1049). Translation is therefore inevitably involved if, for example, a text in a Finnish newspaper contains a citation from a British politician who undoubtedly does not speak Finnish and has given the comment in an international press conference. Often there is only a mention in a newspaper article of an international news agency, and in this case, the article most likely is at least partly a translation. News articles usually have different proportions of translated content, and they can be considered as a continuum: at one end, an article entirely written in a language (for example, a text dealing with a domestic event, with interviews and citations in this language only), and at the other end, an article entirely translated (for example, a column in a Finnish newspaper by an American politician with a mention that the text has been previously published in the *New York Times*). The diarists were aware of this problem, as they had often marked newspaper articles as both translations and non-translations, or used the “do not know” category. If the diarist had not decided whether a text was a translation or not, the reading or consulting times were allocated to the “do not know” category.

Another problematic genre to classify in the diaries collected from 2011 onwards was the content read on Internet pages. Many diarists did not make a distinction between the pages they had consulted, but put together the whole time they had spent, for example, reading the university web pages, consulting dictionaries, going through Facebook statuses and browsing news from newspaper sites. However, the diary form differentiates between Web pages and e-messaging (including social media, which was in itself a text category from 2015 onwards), so that Facebook time should appear in its own category, but many diarists had registered it under Web pages. Similarly, newspapers read and dictionaries consulted have their separate categories (see above). In these kinds of cases where the diary entries were either miscategorized, overlapping in some way, or incomplete, the following classifications were made:

- If separate reading or consultation times for text entries belonging to misplaced categories were mentioned, they were classified in their respective categories. If the division of time spent between different miscategorized text entries was not mentioned, but it was possible to make an estimate on the basis of a comment given by the diarist, the estimate was used; if not, the reading times were left in the given category.
- If the diarist had made an entry of multiple texts belonging to the same category with a singular reading time with overlapping definitions for the texts, the division

of the reading time was either solved with the possible comments given by the diarist or by dividing the reading time equally amongst the given definitions.

- If the diarist had recorded a text entry without defining the text, the text was primarily defined with the additional information recorded in the comments; if there was no additional information recorded, the text was defined as a ‘do not know’ text.
- If the reading time was missing from one entry in a diary, the average time for the same category from other diaries was used.

If the classification between categories was too problematic for several entries or if reading times were missing for several entries, the diary was excluded from the analysis.

6 Results

In the data from all the 366 analysed student diaries, the percentage of translated text, based on the average of the times students reported reading original vs. translated texts, amounts to 31%. Differences between years with the number of diarists are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Proportion of translated text per year, based on reading time, as percentage.

	total	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
N	366	24	28	23	18	42	51	51	86	17	26
%	31	39	27	36	29	23	23	27	38	33	30

The differences between years may be explained by the difference in diarists and the courses they were taking at the collection time. It must also be noted that the numbers of diarists vary between 17 (in 2015) and 86 (in 2014). In 2007 to 2010, the diarists were mainly first year students of French; in 2011 to 2013, mainly students of English, and in 2014 to 2016, students of a larger variety of languages.

6.1 Time spent reading different types of text

Table 4 shows the average times students reported reading daily.

Table 4. Average times used for reading texts, in hours and minutes by year

	total	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
N	366	24	28	23	18	42	51	51	86	17	26
average time	6h45	5h29	5h03	5h17	5h38	6h39	5h48	5h39	7h07	7h01	8h07

The overall average time spent reading texts is 6 hours 45 minutes. The differences between years vary from 5h03 (in 2008) to 8h07 (in 2016).

Table 5 shows the division of the reported reading times into categories. The division into years is based on the differences in the categories in the diary forms used during different periods of time.

Table 5. Average time reported, in minutes, by text category; comparison between data from 2007-2010 (N=93), 2011-2013 (N=144) and the years 2014 (N=86), 2015 (N=17) and 2016 (N=26).

	total	2007-2010	2011-2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of diaries	237	93	144	86	17	26
Newspapers	17	19	16	25	16	16
Periodicals	8	11	7	8	10	2
Scientific publications	15	10	17	27	6	9
Dictionaries		-	-	-	15	10
Literature (fact and fiction)	42	29	50	44	-	-
Factual literature		-	-	-	18	32
Fictional literature		-	-	-	14	21
Religious texts		-	-	0	-	3
Social media & e-messaging	39	27	47	68	-	-
Social media		-	-	-	29	46
E-messaging						
Personal communications		-	-	-	-	47
E-mail		-	-	-	14	-
Chat		-	-	-	20	-
Text messages		-	-	-	3	-
Internet	56	51	60	48	-	-
Other news		-	-	-	14	12
Blogs		-	-	-	14	7
Web forums		-	-	-	2	5
User interfaces		-	-	31	34	40
Publicity, announcements	3	3	2	4	1	8
Instructions etc.	4	5	3	5	4	6
Subtitles	56	56	57	61	64	88
Administrative texts	2	3	2	4	-	2
Official Internet pages		-	-	-	8	-
Work- or study-related material	1h31	1h38	1h28	1h33	33	41
Study-related translations		-	-	-	18	9
Lecture slides & materials, Moodle		-	-	-	56	71
Other	10	8	12	11	30	11
Total	5h43	5h19	5h59	7h07	7h01	8h07

On average, the students reported spending most time reading material related to their (work or) studies, between 1 and 2 hours, which is understandable as they were students. Subtitles take the second place, and there is a clear increase from 56 minutes in 2007 to 88 minutes in 2016. The rest of the Top 5 list includes Internet pages (with blogs and web forums included), literature and e-messaging / social media.

Variation in time used reading literature can be explained by the courses the students were taking while keeping the diary. For example, the English first and second year students had courses in English literature and the history of the English language when keeping the diary, and they reported reading books such as *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *History of English*.

As for e-messaging and social media, the development in technology during the time the data was collected brought about a change in the habits of connecting with other

people. In 2007, social media was only emerging – the diarists mentioned using chat programs such as Microsoft Messenger, installed on laptop or tabletop computers. Facebook was created in 2004, but it started to become popular in Finland only in 2007 (Saarikoski & al. 2009: 310–311). In the student diaries, Facebook is mentioned for the first time in 2008 (in 9 diaries out of 24). In 2013, mobile devices were already common, and some applications and applets were used on mobile phones only.

6.2 Proportion of translated text

Tables 6 and 7 show the time reported for different text categories as it was distributed between texts read in original, in translation, and the texts of which the diarist is not sure. The numbers are presented in two separate tables due to differences in the categories of the diary form used when collecting the data.

Table 6. Average reading time spent, in minutes, by text category and by translatedness (original, translated or do not know); comparison between data from 2007-2010 (N=93), 2011-2013 (N=144) and 2014 (N=86).

	Original			Translated			Do not know		
	2007-2010	2011-2013	2014	2007-2010	2011-2013	2014	2007-2010	2011-2013	2014
Newspapers	22	12	16	4	0.8	4	0.5	3	5
Periodicals	12	5	6	2	1	1		0.5	1
Scientific publications	10	17	22	1	0.8	4		< 0.5	2
Literature (fact and fiction)	20	36	24	15	14	20		< 0.5	0
Internet	37	47	47	11	5	16	3	6	5
E-messaging / Social media	28	37	31	1	7	12	< 0.5	2	5
User interfaces	-	-	8	-	-	21	-	-	2
Publicity, announcements	2	1	3	1	< 0.5	0	0.5	0.5	0
Instructions etc.	3	1	2	3	2	2	< 0.5	0.5	1
Subtitles	1	9	9	56	47	53		< 0.5	0
Administrative texts	3	1	3	0.5	< 0.5	0	< 0.5	< 0.5	0
Work- or study-related material	1h17	1h13	59	14	7	27	2	7	8
Other	10	8	7	1	2	1	0.5	1	1

Table 7. Average reading time spent, in minutes, by text category and by translatedness (original, translated or do not know); comparison between data from 2015 (N=17) and 2016 (N=26).

	Original		Translated		Do not know	
	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016
Newspapers	14	10	2	5	0	1
Periodicals	8	1	0	1	2	0
Scientific publications	6	9	0	0	0	0
Fictional literature	5	14	8	7	0	0
Factual literature	18	28	0	0	0	5
Dictionaries	11	10	4	0	0	0
Other news	4	9	10	2	0	1
Blogs	14	7	0	0	0	0
Web forums	2	5	0	0	0	0
Internet pages	3	5	5	0	0	1
Religious texts	-	2	-	1	-	0
Administrative texts	-	1	-	0	-	0
Social media	18	39	10	4	1	3
Personal communications (email, chat, text messages)	35	42	2	4	1	0
User interfaces	6	7	3	30	25	2
Instructions etc.	2	4	2	2	0	0
Publicity, announcements	1	5	0	2	0	1
Subtitles	0	20	64	66	0	0
Lecture slides etc.	39	65	15	2	2	5
Study-related translations	10	2	8	7	0	0
Other work- or study-related material	29	26	4	12	0	4
Other	27	9	2	1	1	1

Text categories that can be considered ‘typically original’ are scientific publications and factual literature, Internet pages, e-messaging and study-related material. Subtitles are ‘typically translations’, although the average time spent reading subtitles in the source language has grown. This is due to the development in technology during the 10 years (advent of first DVD’s, digital broadcasting and later streaming services) that has made it possible to have subtitles in several languages, including the source language. Another text category that belongs to the ‘typically translated’ texts is user interfaces, even though some of the diarists also reported using their mobile devices and software interfaces in their original languages. Publicity and instructions account for approximately the same amounts of time in both original and translation. Subtitles take the largest amount of time in the translated category.

7 Discussion and limitations of the research

When starting this research, it was decided to proceed with a diary form with predefined categories. As suggested by Gerschuny (2000), this made the data difficult to interpret for some categories, as the diarists did not always understand the terminology in the same manner. In the first years, this was not a problem, as the diary assignment was part of a course where the students received personal feedback on their assignments (translations and text analysis) at the end of the course, and at this point, the author who taught the course was able to ask for clarifications. In the later years, however, she did not have personal contact with the students after collecting the diaries, and the authors had to do some reclassification, if possible, leave the diary out altogether, or use the category “do not know”.

In addition to the changes in Internet pages and social media discussed above, another text category that has undergone a significant change during the research period is newspapers. Compared with 2007, printed newspapers are facing a crisis and have started to move online. Their web sites nowadays contain a lot of constantly updated news content freely available online that differs from the printed daily newspaper, which again may differ from the online content available only by subscription. Therefore, classifying newspaper content read on a newspaper’s web site does not necessarily correspond to reading a newspaper article. In fact, the problem with the classification is that newspapers, magazines and Internet pages are not text genres in the same way as instructions, advertisements or literature, and it would have been wiser to name the first category “news items” or “pieces of news”. However, in 2007 it was difficult to foresee the development of tablet computers and smartphones and the effect the technology would have on the texts. In future studies, the classification on the diary form could be changed to contain a “news” category.

As discussed in relation to newspaper texts, it is not always easy to tell whether a text is a translation or not. Literature and subtitles are basically the only genres where the translator is usually mentioned; in non-fiction texts the name of the translator does not appear. However, there are signs telling that there must be translation involved, such as the use of several languages, as in multilingual web sites or package texts, or the knowledge of the origins of the text, such as with social media applications or user instructions of an imported product. Language and translator students are also usually aware of such signs.

A category that was missing in the beginning of the study is software: the user interfaces of any computer or mobile application consist of text (menus, commands, dialog boxes, error messages) which is often translated. Previously, a few diarists noted these in the “Other” category and from 2014 onwards ‘User interfaces’ were introduced as their own text category on the diary form. However, user interfaces are difficult texts to recognize as an independent text category, because they overlap with Internet, social media, and e-messaging related texts and they are mostly read subconsciously. A number of diarists, a number slightly increasing with time, did reference the interface in their comments: for example, they mention that their Facebook user interface is in Finnish (=a translation) but the status updates are written in the L1 of the writer (=not a translation).

Some have listed these kinds of entries about Facebook in both Internet pages and social media, and separated the two in their comments saying that the time marked in the Internet page category was used reading status updates and the time in social media was a Facebook chat with someone without recognizing the interface text as an independent text category.

8 Conclusion

The proportion of translated text in the data analyzed from 366 translator and language students' diaries, based on reported reading times, amounts to 31%. The data was collected over 10 years, and there is variation between the years, ranging from 23% to 39%. The result is similar to previous studies of the same nature, where the proportion of translations seems to situate below and above one-third, ranging from 25% (Verwerft 2011) to 44% (Mäkisalo 2006).

The proportion of translated material for language and translator students is understandably lower, as they spend a considerable time reading study-related material (between 1 and 2 hours on average) and literature in the (foreign) language they are studying. However, a typically translated text category, subtitles, accounts for 56 minutes on average of these students' day. Subtitles are therefore an important and visible example of translated text. Publicity and instructions, in contrast, do not take much time in a student's life, but half of them is translated.

The collected data span a period of 10 years during which our digital landscape has considerably changed. The starting year, 2007, marked the advent of digital television in Finland, which, among other things, required viewers to update their equipment but enabled the selection of subtitles in different languages. This already started a shift towards other means for viewing programs than a fixed TV set. The most recent yearly summary for TV viewing in Finland published by Finnpanel (2024) depicts the change that has taken place in the last ten years in the way we view TV; since the beginning of 2020s, using streaming services has been more popular than viewing live TV, and in 2023 only 38% of Finns preferred watching live TV (Finnpanel 2024). The beginning of this trend is visible in the increased figure of read subtitles in the text diaries from 2014 onwards as shown in Table 5.

The results suggest that even a third of all the text the diarists come across in everyday life is translated. As the data analysed here concern language and translator students only, it might be assumed that the proportion for an average Finn, not exposed to foreign languages to the same extent, would be higher, as suggested by the data collected from other than student participants (Vihonen & Salmi 2007). However, other factors such as occupation probably have a considerable influence on reading habits. In any case, it is justified to say that we live among translated texts – translations are everywhere around us.

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Appendix

Example of a filled-in diary from 2012 (diarist T1228, our translation from Finnish into English)

Type	Name or description	language (if not Finnish)	time	translated		comments
				yes	no/DK	
Newspapers	Sue		15 min	x		
Periodicals						
Scientific publications	Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary		5 min	x		
Literature (fact and fiction)	The Diary of a Nobody (Grosmith)	English	40 min	x	Wide Sargasso Sea is one of the novels to be read for the course "Contemporary Literature"	
	Wide Sargasso Sea (Jean Rhys)		70 min	x		
Internet	BBC News, Livejournal, Wikipedia, tumblr, Girls with slingshots, Questionable content, book depository		1,5 h	x	Apparently, a part of the articles I read on the BBC site were translations, but this is nearly impossible to tell. In Wikipedia, I searched for several pieces of information, for example with the queries "magical realism", "Christopher Isherwood", "Great expectations". Tumblr works in English and the accounts I browsed are also written in English, although the writer's mother tongue is another language. Girls with slingshots and QC are net cartoons in English.	
	YLE news, Enfant Terrible, City of Turku: library, swimming hall of Impivaara		15 min	x	Some of the news on YLE site are translations, but they are difficult to distinguish among the ones written directly in Finnish.	
	Niottilem, Beatas bilder	Swedish	15 min	x	Swedish fashion blogs in Swedish	
E-messaging (e-mail, Facebook messaging)	University e-mail, Facebook messaging		10 min	x	All sorts of messages on courses and other stuff of informative nature. In Facebook, messaging about next week's timetables.	
Publicity, brochures, announcements						
Instructions, user guides, package texts etc.	Packages: sun flower oil, Mama noodles, sour cream, softener. Usage instructions: care instructions for lenses		5 min	x		
Subtitles (TV, film)	Jeeves and Wooster	English	30 min	x	As the language used is somewhat old-fashioned and also otherwise deviates from the ordinary, subtitles in English make it easier to understand.	
Administrative texts	Instructions related to a tax form		5 min	x		