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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Overview of the Translation Services Market during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**| ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly influenced the operation activities of many companies cutting their income, forcing them to shift to remote work enabling safety environment for employees and clients. Such constraints could not but affect the translation industry as well. This article focuses on the pandemic consequences for the industry regarding the demand for services and applied technologies in broad terms. Since the translation services market includes a wide range of players like large-scale companies together with freelancers providing different types of translations, it is of particular importance to evaluate all aspects of the problem. For this purpose, surveys conducted by international market research organizations have been studied. They show that one of the ways to address the crisis is to introduce new working methods, translation technologies, and innovations.

**| KEYWORDS**

The COVID-19 pandemic, translation, interpreting, demand, technology.

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### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2022, it is already two years since the COVID-19 outbreak has started. The impact of the pandemic cannot be underestimated. Due to national lockdowns and closure of international borders, operations of many businesses have significantly changed or were shut down at all. The pandemic limitations and social isolation have not bypassed language service providers (LSP) as well as freelance translators and interpreters. The most damage was caused at the beginning of the pandemic when prevention measures were the strictest, and possible solutions to this unprecedented challenge were not developed yet.

A number of surveys show that different sectors of the translation services market have been hit differently depending on the type of translation they provide. This article aims to give an overview of the whole market as well as reveal the most and the least affected sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation, various sources have been analyzed, for instance, surveys conducted by flagship international market research and consulting companies such as CSA Research and Nimdzi.

### 2. Overview of the market during the pandemic

According to the survey conducted by CSA Research in July-August 2020 (see COVID-19 Industry Data & Research), 55% of LSPs declared overall business decrease. In the freelance sector, 55% of linguists experienced a decrease in income with a 57% decrease in volume of work. Among major reasons were uncertainties about the length of the pandemic and an overall slowdown in demand. Herewith, the number of requests for translation in the areas of travel and events has dropped by 88% and 87% accordingly. However, demand in some spheres has increased despite the general negative dynamics. Thus, it is evident that in times of global health emergency, translation of healthcare and pharmaceuticals materials have been of vital importance and above take.

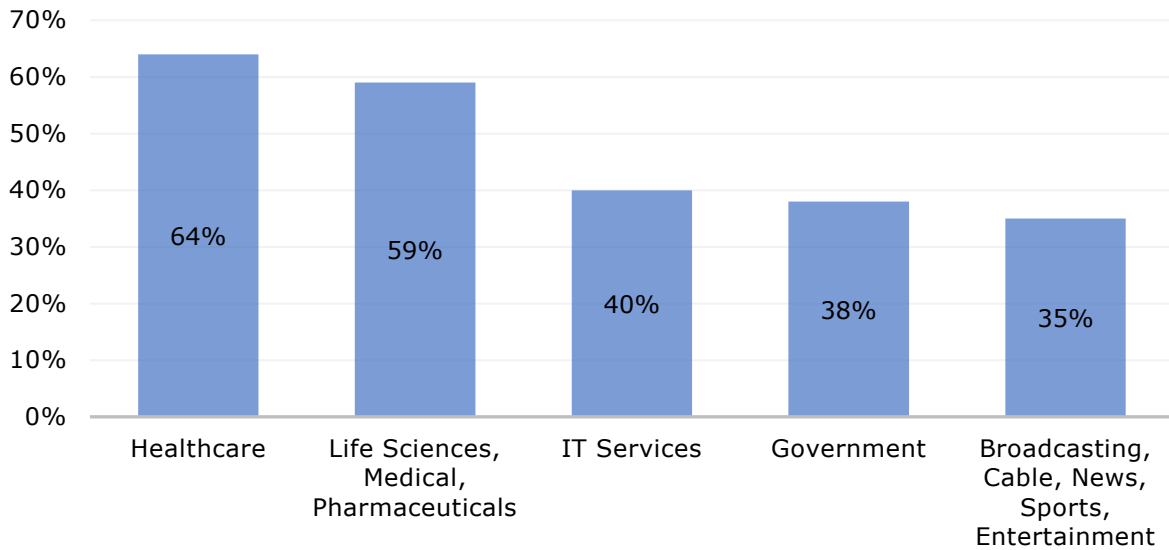


Figure 1. Vertical Markets with Increased Demand for Language Services, 2020

Source: 2020 CSA Research

After one year, CSA Research reached out to translators and interpreters once more. A recent 2021 survey shows that the situation in the market seems to start stabilizing. Compared to August 2020, the number of freelancers with decreased income has dropped significantly and reached 29%. Furthermore, demand for LSPs' services has begun to improve as well. 76% of LSPs have declared an increase in demand, and only 10% of companies have faced reductions. In 2021, the most popular spheres with high numbers of requests from clients were translation or localization (77% up), machine translation-related offerings (71% up), multimedia services (58% up), content or data services (45% up), remote interpreting (41% up), and in-person interpreting (31% up).

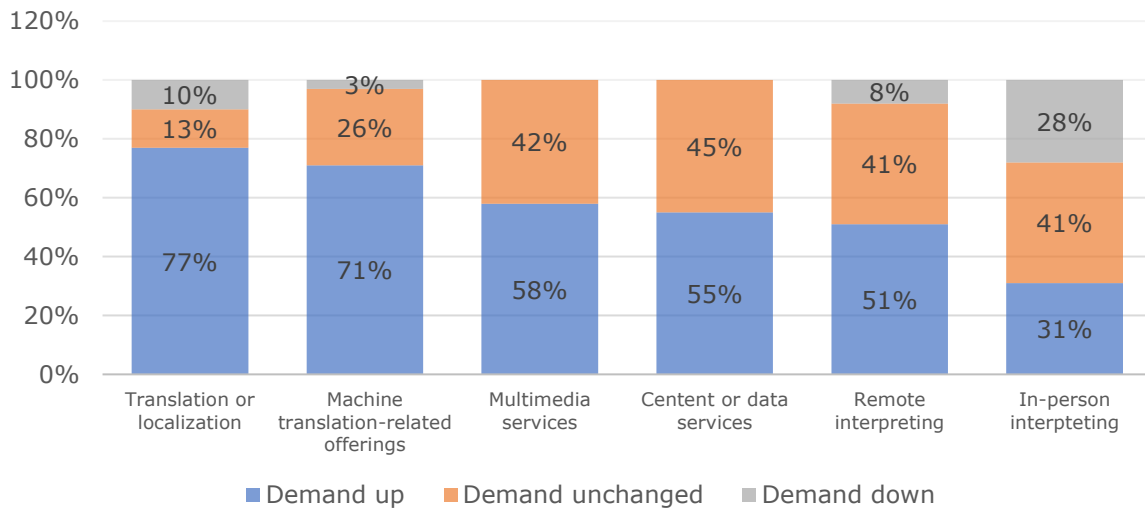


Figure 2. Demand for LSPs services, Q2 2021

Source: 2021 CSA Research

As it can be seen from the fig.2, remote interpreting and in-person interpreting still undergo a slowdown with 28% of the decrease in demand for the latter. Indeed, translators are in some habit of working from home, consulting with vocabularies and glossaries. While interpreters have lost most of their clientele due to social isolation.

At the same time, according to CSA Research, 81% of LSPs and 61% of freelance linguists are optimistic about the industry's future. Both parties try to adapt to the situation that occurred. Some of the companies see an exit from the crisis in implementing technologies and innovations. CSA Research data states that 36% of LSPs heavily adopt language technology and innovate the

process; 47% of companies adopt once products emerge but do not innovate, and only 17% of translation companies are conservative and adopt once the technology is mainstream. Most often, companies prefer applying translation memories, CAT tools, and quality checkers.

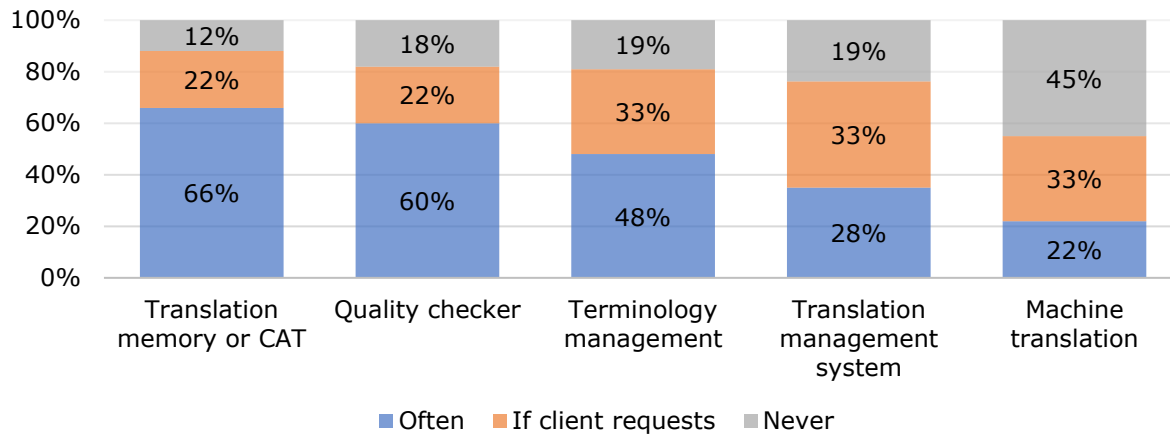


Figure 3. Translation technologies applied by LSPs

Source: 2021 CSA Research

Thereby, it is possible to outline some trends which are relevant for the translation services market during the pandemic:

- the effect of the pandemic on written translation was somewhat average, with an increase in demand in some areas compared to interpreting, which was hit the most. Whilst multimedia and localization have experienced relative growth in demand;
- prevailing translation topics are in the field of health care, medication, wellbeing;
- a lot of specialists start working from home. After the pandemic, only 57% of staff are planning to return to the office;
- one of the common ways among LSPs to tackle the crisis is by introducing technology and innovations.

### 3. Struggles of interpreters

Due to the pandemic, many businesses have been forced to go remote. Many conferences and face-to-face meetings were cancelled, postponed, or shifted online. Such harsh conditions have influenced specialists of the interpreting sector the most. From the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, many of them have had little work or no work at all. Besides, linguists were forced to adapt to new coronavirus reality. For instance, the UN Department of Global Communications (see Portraits: UN interpreters adapt to new work modes during COVID-19) faced big changes in the working routine of UN simultaneous interpreters during the lockdown in New York. It took some time for linguists to adjust. Thus, in the beginning, some meetings were held without interpretation.

The research provided by Nimdzi (see Interpreting in Times of COVID-19) shows that damage scale in the sector varies depending on the type of interpreting. The data shows that onsite interpreting, conference interpreting, public sector interpreting have undergone the greatest impact of the pandemic. Meanwhile, over-the-phone interpreting (OPI), video remote interpreting (VRI), remote simultaneous interpreting have been on the rise.

Undoubtedly, interpreting service providers in different domains have been impacted differently by the crisis. But what worsens the situation is that other industries they cooperate with have been hit as well. In 2020, InterpretAmerica (see InterpretAmerica 2020. Resources) asked over 600 interpreters and LSPs to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 decrease in interpreting requests by sector.

It comes without surprise that companies related to educational services or conferences and business meetings have been experiencing the greatest difficulties during the pandemic due to social isolation as well as the lack of technology.

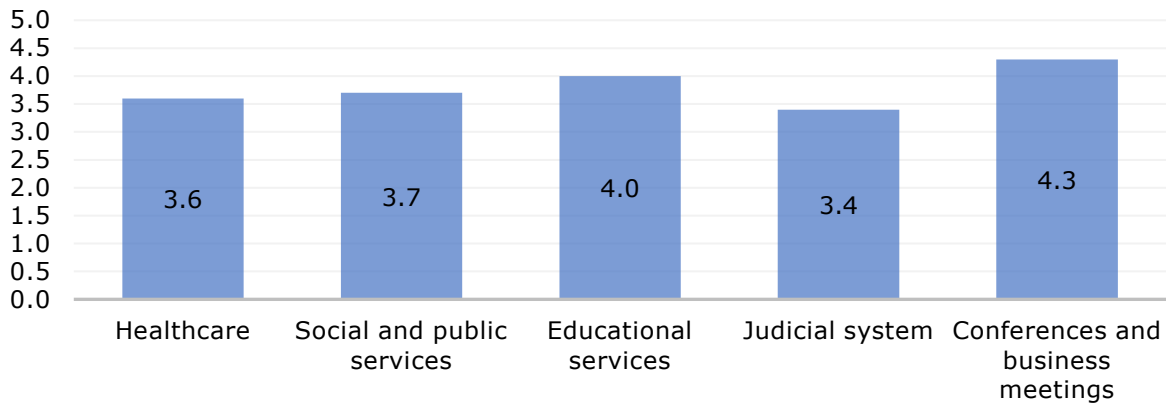


Figure 4. Decrease in interpreting services by sector

Source: InterpretAmerica 2020

Challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic require finding new solutions in the field and implementing modern technologies. Herewith, according to CSA Research, among the most popular interpreting technologies applied during the coronavirus outbreak are OPI platforms, VRI platforms, interpreter portals and consoles.

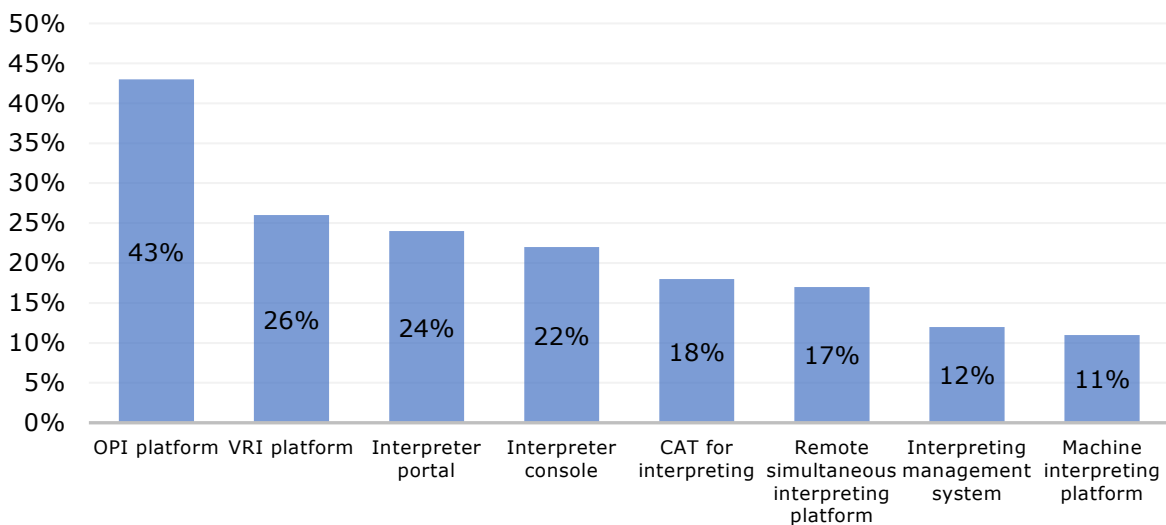


Figure 5. Technologies used by interpreters

Source: CSA Research: The State of the Linguist Supply Chain, 2020

#### 4. Conclusion

The coronavirus pandemic has greatly influenced the translation services industry. Different aspects of the translation job have been under the pressure of the crisis: demand, income, working modes, and technical solutions have completely changed. In particular, the onsite interpreting providers have taken the biggest hit.

Apparently, the full impact on the industry will be seen after some time. For now, we can just say that industry players remain positive and those staying in the market are ready to act. This challenging situation has noticeably boosted the development of the industry. LSPs and freelance translators and interpreters do the utmost to adapt to the changing environment by implementing new tools and technologies, like translation memories, computer-assisted technology, remote working platforms. As Scott Klein, CEO of LanguageLine Solutions highlighted in his July statement: "It is imperative to build organizations that are always finding ways to improve while remaining true to their missions. The pandemic has created a business environment with brand-new challenges. A business must be flexible by design, as opposed to adapting only when the sirens are blaring. We need to prepare for every eventuality and be pleasantly surprised when they don't occur..." (see CSA Research: 14 CEOs Reflect on 2021).

Since the topic addressed is of high importance, further research needs to be done. The presented overview is limited by time constraints and the lack of previous research studies in the field. Herewith, when a bigger data set is assembled regarding the pandemic impact on the world and the translation services industry, in particular, it will be possible to refine the overview conclusions, as well as closer investigate the situation, including in different countries. Thus, further research will include an analysis of the Russian local market and its perspective on the worldwide development in pandemic and post-pandemic times.

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