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## **A survey-based case study to assess the computer skills of incoming first-year students in Translation and Interpreting**

**Abstract:** In Translation Studies, the translator's instrumental competence, directly related to computer knowledge, has gained significant importance and computer-assisted translation or localisation skills are nowadays essential to access the labour market. In order to teach students to use these specific technologies in the translation field, it is necessary that they have in advance a solid base of computer skills. For this reason, this paper presents a survey-based case study that aims to shed light on the level of computer knowledge that incoming first-year students have when they start their studies in Translation and Interpreting. The research has been carried out in a Spanish university and the aim is to confirm whether the group of students that took part in the study had previously developed the technological skills needed to start developing the translator's instrumental competence. Although the study only focuses on a Spanish academic institution and conclusions cannot be extrapolated to other scenarios until further research is carried out, according to the results provided by the group, it has been concluded that, in spite of the fact that students cannot be considered illiterate with regard to their use of new technologies, their general computer skills should be reinforced during the degree before they are introduced to the use of more specialised translation tools.

**Key words:** instrumental competence, incoming first-year students, translation training, new technologies, survey-based case study

### **Introduction**

It cannot be denied that in the 21st century new technologies have become a key element of daily life. In Translation Studies, instrumental competence, comprising the use of documentary resources, IT tools for professional practice and terminological research (Kelly 2005: 32–33, Hurtado Albir 2017: 39–40), has become a primary competence in the curricula and has found its place among the classical linguistic and cultural competences. This fact has been confirmed by several projects, like OPTIMALE, which includes the use of translation memory systems among the top ten competences of professional translators

(Toudic 2012: 12), or the new framework of competences proposed by the EMT Board (2017), which even mentions machine translation.

To develop the instrumental competences needed to use translation memories, localisation tools or termbases, students should have a solid base of computer skills beforehand. These should mainly include global knowledge about hardware and software, word processors, the use of Internet and e-mail (*cf.* Reuther 1999). Sometimes it is assumed that incoming students are proficient in the use of any kind of technology. But do their skills provide a solid foundation from which to develop the translator's instrumental competence? This article presents a case study that aims to assess the computer skills of incoming first-year students in Translation and Interpreting Studies at the University of Málaga (Spain) during the academic year 2016–2017. The main objective is to confirm whether the IT knowledge of this group of students is sufficient to start developing the translator's instrumental competence. As a professional translator and lecturer, I am aware of the importance of being an advanced computer user. In 2016 I had the opportunity of collaborating as a lecturer in a course covering computer tools applied to Translation and Interpreting, and large differences in levels of knowledge between students were obvious. This was the main reason for the decision to conduct the research here presented.

In this article, the reader will find a descriptive, non-experimental study based on a survey conducted among students that aims to describe and understand a specific reality, IT knowledge among incoming students in a Spanish university, using several dependent variables in a specific moment and place. First of all, the study will be contextualised and the research questions will be presented. To answer those questions, the methodology, the design of the survey and the sample will be addressed. Finally, the most relevant results will be analysed from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

## **1. Contextualisation of the study and research questions**

At the University of Málaga (Spain), the course “Computer Tools Applied to Translation and Interpreting” is worth 6 ECTS and is offered during the second semester of the bachelor's degree; it is the only technology course in these studies, so during this course students are expected to acquire the necessary instrumental skills that they will later apply in translation courses. Its syllabus focuses mainly on general IT, word processors, Internet and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools.

During my teaching career, I have noticed that, when the different stakeholders involved in the teaching-learning process are asked, there is an enormous

disparity in their opinions regarding the content of this course. On the one hand, students consider that more attention should be paid to translator's tools (translation memories, terminological and localisation tools, etc.), which at the moment are only part of a module taken at the end of the course. On the other hand, many teachers share the view that the computer skills of incoming students should be reinforced during the degree. These skills include the use of tools such as Word and the e-mail, to mention just two, as it is quite common that weaknesses are identified in the way students use them. The teachers' perspective is supported by the fact that most of the new EHEA Bachelor's degrees in Translation and Interpreting in Spain have included one or even several introductory courses to computer tools (Plaza-Lara 2016: 271).

The positions of both students and teachers are completely understandable, so efforts should be made to satisfy the demands of both groups. One of the premises underpinning this study is that students' proficiency in IT tools is required as the foundation for the development of instrumental skills which are specific to the translator's professional profile (use of translation memories, for example). As will be described in the following section, during secondary education students should have acquired certain transversal skills with regard to information and communication technologies. For this reason, taking into account the opinions of students and teachers described above, the main research questions of this article can be formulated as follows:

- Is the computer knowledge of incoming first-year students at the University of Málaga sufficient to enable them to start working directly with translation tools?
- Does it make sense to include a course covering IT fundamentals during the Translation and Interpreting Degree or should attention be focused only on translation technologies?

These research questions must be understood within the framework of this study and the sample described in the following section.

## **2. Methodology and design of the survey**

The questionnaire survey is a quantitative method commonly used in sociological research. It allows us to collect background information on research participants (Saldanha and O'Brien 2013). As stated before, this paper presents a descriptive, non-experimental study that takes into account several dependent variables (whether qualitative or quantitative) that have been operationalised in questions dealing with different components of instrumental competence.

These variables or questions will make it possible to draw conclusions about the research questions.

The questionnaire used for the survey takes the form of an initial assessment and was developed to evaluate students' level of knowledge in general IT tools and adapt the content to their educational needs in order to anchor new skills. It was an online anonymous survey created using Google Forms and it could be answered at home<sup>1</sup>. Students were informed about the purposes of the survey and were asked to answer honestly. Furthermore, in those cases where they were familiar with a certain feature but did not remember the process by heart, they were permitted to check it on the computer.

The drafting of the survey items is based on the following information sources:

- Spanish legislation on secondary education. According to the *Royal Decree 1105/2014 of 26 December*, which sets out the basic curriculum for secondary education, transversal skills should include information and communication technologies. For this reason, word processors, multimedia resources, Internet and social media, and slide presentations can be found among the competences of various courses. Basic knowledge about computer programming and networks is also promoted. In the last two years of secondary school, two optional courses on this topic are also offered. Although the content may vary from one Autonomous Region to another, after analysing those offered in Andalusia<sup>2</sup> it can be concluded that the competences provided should be enough to allow students to develop computer competences.
- The syllabus of the course included in the analysis, “Computer Tools Applied to Translation and Interpreting” at the University of Málaga. Although the National Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agency of Spain (ANECA<sup>3</sup>) establishes some minimum requirements for university study programmes, each university adapts them to their own context. As in this survey the sample included comes exclusively from the University of Málaga, no other centre was considered, but this should be taken into account for further research in the future.

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1 To see the survey, please visit <https://forms.gle/9rb9gfSnJUAhT3Ud6> [23.04.2021].

2 See information provided on: <http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/educacion/permanente/materiales/index.php?etapa=3&materia=230#space> [23.04.2021].

3 ANECA stands for Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación in Spanish.

- My own experience as a lecturer and professional translator and project manager for the last ten years enabled me to draw conclusions about existing weaknesses with regard to training in IT tools.

Studies about the instrumental competence, such as the *Libro Blanco sobre el Título de Grado en Traducción e Interpretación*<sup>4</sup> (Muñoz Raya and Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación 2004), the OPTIMALE project and the most relevant models around the notion of translation competence (Kelly 2005: 32–33, EMT Board 2017, Hurtado Albir 2017: 39–40) were also considered for the design of the survey, but it must be pointed out that these studies only focus on the skills that a translator should acquire during their degree, not on their previous knowledge. For this reason, they have only been taken as a reference to establish the knowledge needed to start developing instrumental competences.

The questionnaire is divided in five different sections. The first module contains questions (12 items) covering demographic information. The following modules focus on different aspects of computer skills: general IT (11 items), word processors (7 items), Internet (8 items) and e-mail (5 items). These groups were included because they are some of the usual tools that these students should be familiar with, according to the information sources mentioned above.

Because the questionnaire is used as an initial assessment, it is not based on psychometric scales such as the Guttman, Thurstone or Likert scales, and students did not have to express attitudes (only one of the questions asked about attitude), agreement or disagreement. The purpose was to evaluate the level of knowledge with regard to general IT tools, so open and closed questions were included. Apart from the demographic information, the following types of questions can be distinguished:

- Questions about IT knowledge: tasks, processes and identification of features that cover from basic to advanced knowledge in order to measure their level of knowledge. Sometimes several correct answers were possible.
- Questions about technological behaviour: the technological skills of incoming students are also acquired thanks to the daily use of technologies, so these questions will confirm whether the use of technologies implies the development of IT skills.

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4 Translation of the title into English: *White Paper on Bachelor Degrees in Translation and Interpreting*.

- Self-assessment questions: to confirm whether students are aware of their skills and of the difficulties of being proficient in IT. They can partly be considered as control questions, as they allow the comparison of students' perceptions of their level of knowledge and the results of the survey.

### **2.1. Pilot test**

A pilot-test survey was conducted in order to identify potential problems and observe whether the initial questions worked properly. The sample used for this test included a total of 10 students with the same features as the final participants. These students were asked via e-mail to answer the survey and to provide information about the following issues:

- Time needed to answer the whole survey;
- Problems and errors found when filling it in;
- Questions and answers that were not clear enough or that could cause confusion.

The information provided by this group of students was quite useful and after analysing the answers, some other problems were detected that needed to be solved before proceeding with the final survey. First of all, it was discovered that some questions needed further explanation in order to avoid misunderstandings. For example, when referring to the use of e-mail clients, a definition was included, because some students may not know what Outlook or Thunderbird refer to. Some unnecessary questions were also deleted, as it was noted that they did not provide information for our research questions. In the Internet section, for example, one question asked about the Internet browser they use in their daily life. And finally it was also decided to replace some open questions with multiple choice questions for the purposes of analysis. For example, initially students were asked to define hyperlinks. In the final questionnaire, four different definitions were provided so that the student could choose the correct one.

## **3. Survey sample**

As for every statistical study, the ideal situation would have been to use random sampling that included students from different educational backgrounds and universities. However, due to time constraints, this study had to be limited to the students enrolled in that course at the University of Málaga. The type of sampling used in this case is called purposive or convenience sampling; hence, inferential statistics cannot be applied.

The questionnaire was sent to 160 students. A total of 146 answers were received from students enrolled in the course during the academic year 2016–2017. Although 3 of them were discarded because of repetition or incomplete answers, this can be considered a high response rate.

The sample consisted of 119 women (83.22 %) and 24 men (16.78 %). As this course is offered in the first year of the degree, the majority of respondents (73.42 %) were born in 1998. The rest of the sample could be divided, as shown in Table 1, in 4 groups.

**Table 1.** Age distribution of the sample

Year of birth	Percentage
1998	73.42 %
1990–1997	21.68 %
1980–1989	2.1 %
1950–1970	2.8 %

Just over ninety per cent (90.9 %) of the respondents were born in Spain, while the rest (9.1 %) came from different countries<sup>5</sup>. Most of them (97.2 %) completed their secondary school studies in Spain and only 2.8 % of the students finished them in their country of origin.

## 4. Analysis of results

In this section, in order to avoid a list of quantitative data, answers will be analysed by categories to offer a comprehensive overview. For this reason, the reader may find that this analysis of results does not strictly follow the order of the survey. Furthermore, figures and tables have only been created for some of the questions in order to facilitate reading.

### 4.1. Personal information

The aim of the first section of questions was to gather demographic data (already presented in the sample section) and information about students' IT education and use in their daily lives. Contrary to what is stated in the Royal Decree that sets out the basic curriculum for secondary education and that offers two optional IT courses, more than half of the group (52.45 %) has never completed

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5 Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, England, Italy, Serbia, Slovakia, Morocco, Ukraine.

a course or module covering IT subject matter. Regarding their previous professional experience, the low rate of affirmative responses (4.9 %<sup>6</sup>) confirms that their knowledge has not been obtained through hands-on experience at work. With regard to the number of hours they spend every day on the computer, almost 49 % of the students spend less than 2 hours. The use of the computer 2 hours a day may obviously be complemented with the use other types of technologies, not only the computer, but a later question (see Fig. 2) confirms that the computer is one of the most used technologies.

Although the next group of questions in this section does not provide objective information about students' IT skills, they are useful for comparing their perceptions with their real knowledge. The first question asks them to define their level of computer skills. Almost half of the students (48.25 %) were modest and defined their level as average, while only 15.38 % considered they had high computer skills.

The following contingency tables summarise the interrelation between the variables analysed in the previous paragraphs.

**Table 2.** Interrelation between students' definition of their level of computer skills and the time they spend every day on the computer

Daily time spent on the computer	Less 1 h	1–2 h	2–4 h	4–6 h	More 6 h
Level of computer skills/					
Very low	50.00 %	37.50 %	12.50 %	0.00 %	0.00 %
Low	13.64 %	54.55 %	22.73 %	6.82 %	2.26 %
Average	5.80 %	36.23 %	43.48 %	11.59 %	2.90 %
High	0.00 %	18.18 %	50.00 %	27.27 %	4.55 %

Table 2 shows that between 67 % and 87 % of those that defined their knowledge as low or very low spend less than 2 hours on the computer, and 50 %-75 % of the respondents that considered their knowledge average or high spend between 2 and 6 hours every day.

Regarding the interrelation between their level of computer skills and the completion of a course or module, it can be confirmed that there exists a direct correlation between these two variables, as Table 3 shows.

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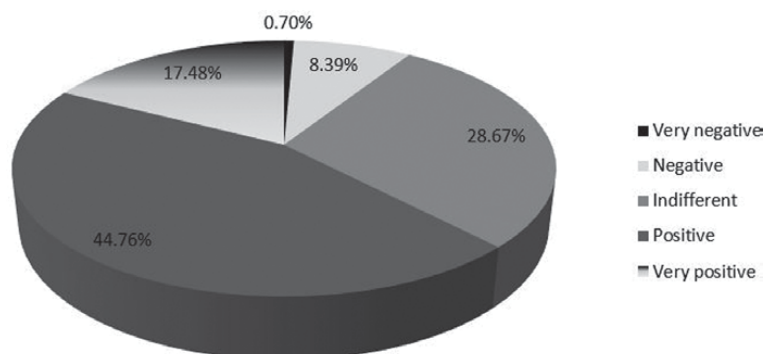
6 Two teleoperators, check-in and boarding agent, digital image processing, secretary, computer technician, Spanish Red Cross volunteer.

**Table 3.** Interrelation between the definition of their level of computer skills and completion of an IT course or module

Course completed	Yes	No
Level of computer skills		
Very low	25.00 %	75.00 %
Low	34.09 %	65.91 %
Average	52.17 %	47.83 %
High	68.18 %	31.82 %

The students' definition of their level of computer skills contrasts with their attitude to computers: more than 60 % of students showed a (very) positive attitude to the use of computers (see Fig. 1). However, considering that students born in the digital era are being surveyed, it seems surprising that almost 40 % of the respondents remain 'indifferent' or have a negative attitude to computers. This relatively high rate may be due to previous negative personal experiences (unsatisfactory teaching methods, loss of data, unresolved problems with the personal computer, etc.) and it would have been useful to have compared the results here obtained with the attitude of these students towards other types of technologies, such as smartphones or tablets.

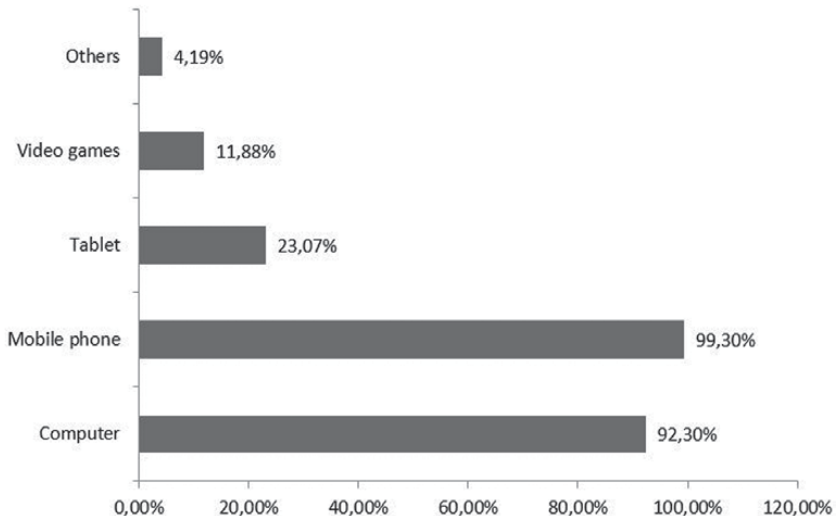
### How would you define your attitude to the use of computers?

**Fig. 1.** Results for question "How would you define your attitude towards the use of computers?"

It is therefore possible to affirm that according to the answers analysed in this section, almost half of the group does not have the necessary previous experience with computers to ensure that they will have advanced IT skills.

#### 4.2. General IT

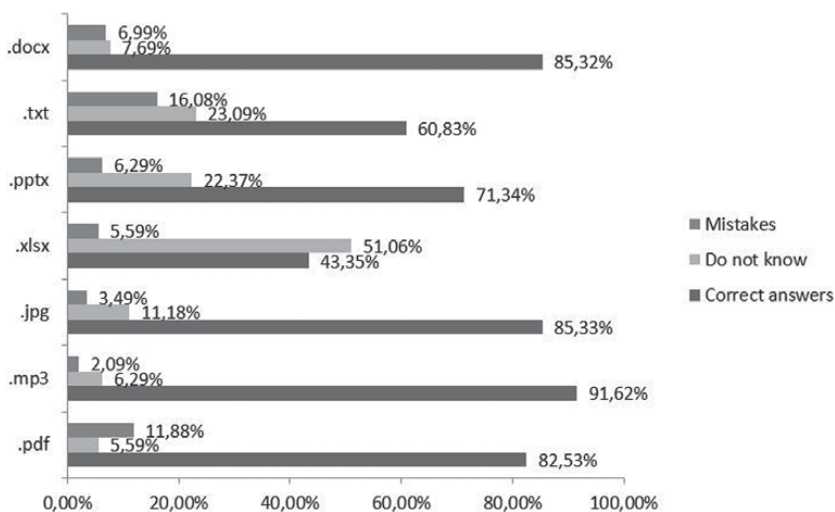
To gain a general impression of the use students make of IT, they were asked about the technologies they use in their daily life (*cf.* Fig. 2). Mobile phone use (99.30 %) exceeds computer use (92.30 %) in students' answers. The most typical combination was the computer and the mobile phone (58.74 %), followed by the computer, mobile phone and tablet (17.48 %). This high rate of use of new technologies contrasts with the answers presented in the previous section, such as the time they spend on the computer (49 % of the students spend less than 2 hours or less on the computer), their perception of their IT skills (48.25 % of the students defined their level as average) and their attitude to computers (40 % of the respondents remain 'indifferent' or have a negative attitude to computers).



**Fig. 2.** Results for question “What kinds of technologies do you use every day?”

The following group of questions is directly related to operating systems and software. Almost three-quarters (74.13 %) confirmed that they have never formatted a computer's drive and more than half of the respondents (53.15 %)

affirmed either that they have difficulty with the installation of new software or that they cannot do it alone. Therefore, it can be assumed that more than half of the respondents lack this kind of procedural knowledge. However, 90.21 % of the students could identify what an operating system is. Regarding formats (cf. Fig. 3), around 80–90 % of the respondents recognised files with extensions .docx, .jpg, .mp3 and .pdf. This rate fell to 43–60 % for .xlsx and .txt files.

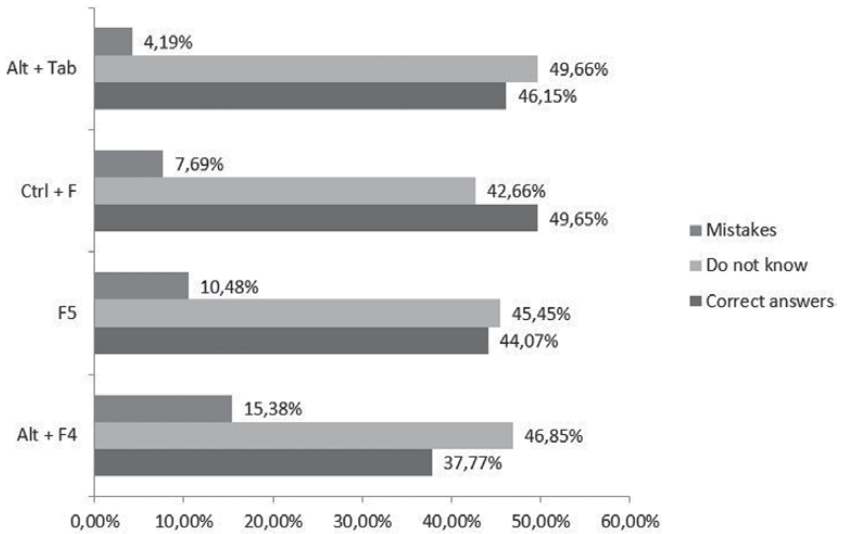


**Fig. 3.** Results for question “Which software can open files with the following extensions?”

These data can be opposed to the perception they have of their level of knowledge of certain software: between 60–70 % of the respondents considered their knowledge of Word and PowerPoint to be high or very high. Excel seems to be a less well-known tool (58 % defined their level as low). Regarding Acrobat, almost 45 % of the sample defined their level as average, maybe because it is considered a tool used only for reading PDF files, without taking into account its possibilities for comments, deletions, additions, etc. regularly used for reviewing.

The following three questions are related to keyboard. It is striking that the tab key, widely used, is only correctly identified by 76.22 % of the respondents. It must be noted that this key is not present on mobile phones, it is only used on computer keyboards. The same applies for the Alt Gr key. Only 58.05 % of the

respondents were able to indicate that this key is necessary to write square brackets on a Spanish keyboard. Furthermore, 65 % of the students confused the shift key with the caps lock key, maybe because on tablets and mobile phones the same key is used for both features. The question about keyboard shortcuts (cf. Fig. 4) had a hit rate of 37–50 % for all the questions, and the rate of “Do not know” answer was quite high for all instances (42–50 %).



**Fig. 4.** Results for question “What are these keyboard shortcuts used for?”

The last two questions in this category refer to two types of software that any computer should have installed, file compressors and antivirus programs. Even though compressed files can be downloaded from the Internet, only 51.75 % of the respondents could identify .zip or .rar file extensions. Concerning the use of antivirus software, 63.64 % of the students affirmed they knew how to analyse the computer using it, however it should be verified whether they can examine data provided and solve possible problems found.

It can be concluded that for the items in this section, the hit rate progressively decreases as the level of difficulty increases. This inverse correlation could indicate that some specific features are not widely known by this group of students.

### 4.3. Word processors

The first two questions in this block are closely related. Students were asked how to save a Word file as a .pdf, and how to save a .doc file as an .rtf. Even though the process is practically the same, the hit rate varied a lot from one question to another: 72.72 % for the Word>.pdf question and 17.48 % for the .doc>.rtf item. This information demonstrates that sometimes students are not able to apply intuition and the same principles to the same process.

With regard to the features of word processors, as answering several questions regarding different features might have proved arduous for students, only some were mentioned and they were asked to indicate whether they were familiar with them or not, and if they used them (see Table 4). Features such as changing font type or creating tables are widely known (85–99 %), but others such as comparing files or inserting tables of contents are only used by 9–26 % of the respondents.

**Table 4.** Results for question “Indicate if you know and use the following features of word processors like Word”

	Yes, I use it.	Yes, but I don't know how to use it.	No, I don't know./ I don't use it.
Change font type/size	98.60 %	0.70 %	0.70 %
Search and replace	39.86 %	24.48 %	35.66 %
Insert table of contents automatically	25.17 %	44.76 %	30.07 %
Create tables and columns	85.31 %	9.79 %	4.90 %
Compare two files	9.09 %	27.27 %	63.64 %
Use the spell checker	84.62 %	12.58 %	2.80 %

Closely related to this item was the question about keyboard shortcuts (*cf.* Fig. 5). Word processors are a common tool for students, so they may be more used to these shortcuts than those included in the general IT section. However, only the copy-paste features obtained a hit rate between 73–78 %; for the rest of them it was again around 50 % or less. Taking into account the results of these two questions, it can be concluded that only the most commonly used shortcuts are widely known by this group of students.

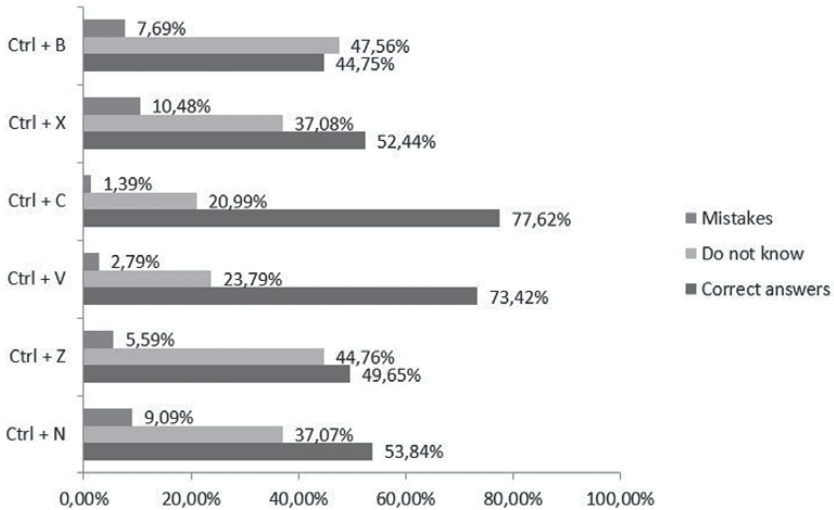


Fig. 5. Results for question “In Word, what are these keyboard shortcuts used for?”

Two items concerning more advanced knowledge were included: paragraph marks and other hidden formatting symbols could be identified by 28.67 % of the respondents and only 25.17 % of them knew how to insert special characters such as Spanish quotation marks (« . . »), either using the symbol feature or using the ASCII code.

These data can be compared with those about their level of knowledge of certain tools: almost 65 % of the students considered they have a high or very high level in the use of Word. In this case, students tend to overvalue their level of knowledge, maybe because they are not familiar with most of the features these tools offer.

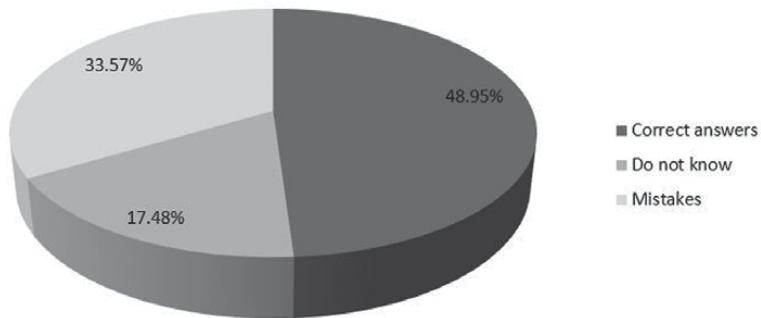
#### 4.4. Internet

The first question in this block refers to search engines. Only 55.24 % of the respondents were able to name a search engine other than Google. It was also found that a high rate of respondents confused search engines and web browsers, maybe because Google belongs to both categories. In connection with search engines, only 40.56 % of the respondents knew that quotation marks are used to carry out an exact search for the term or expression between them.

With regard to website formats or file extensions (*cf.* Fig. 6), around 48.95 % of the students were able to answer this question correctly (.html). From the

incorrect answers, 25 % thought .es or .com are their file extensions and 75 % chose “It depends on the website country”.

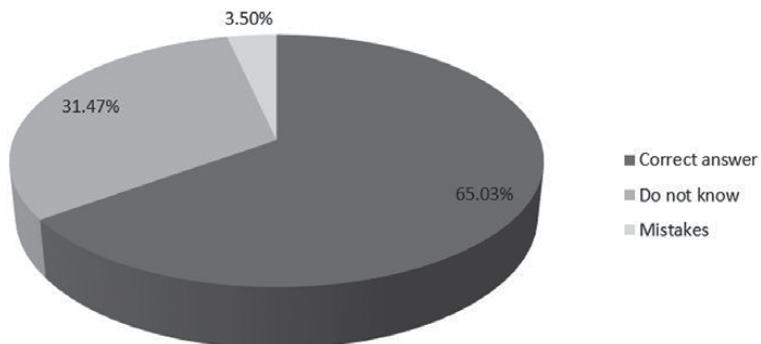
### What is the format of a website or, in other words, what is its file extension?



**Fig. 6.** Results for question “What is the format of a website or, in other words, what is its file extension?”

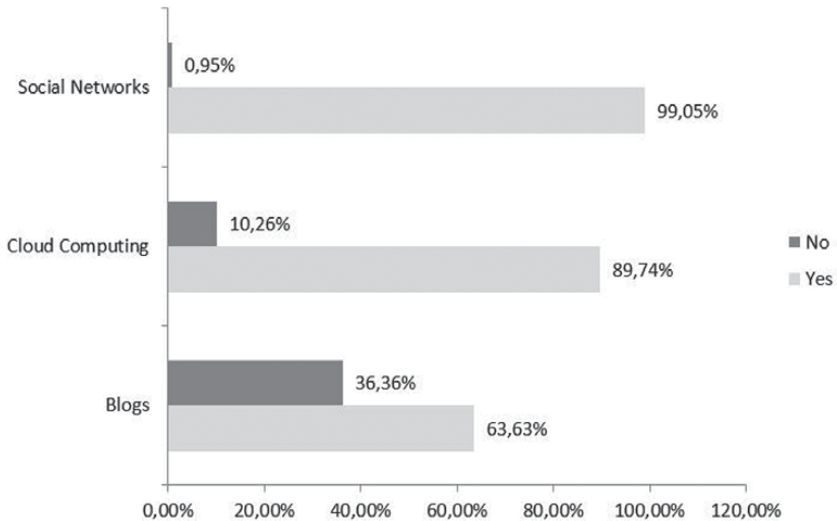
As frequent internet users, these students should be used to the presence of hyperlinks in websites. However, 34.97 % of the respondents were not able to choose the correct definition for this term (*cf.* Fig. 7).

### What are website hyperlinks?



**Fig. 7.** Results for question “What are website hyperlinks?”

The last three questions in this section were related to some Internet tools: blogs, cloud computing and social networks. As Fig. 8 shows, these tools are commonly used by at least 60 % of the respondents. The percentage is particularly high for social networks with almost 100 % affirmative responses.



**Fig. 8.** Results for the questions regarding the use of blogs, cloud computing tools and social networks

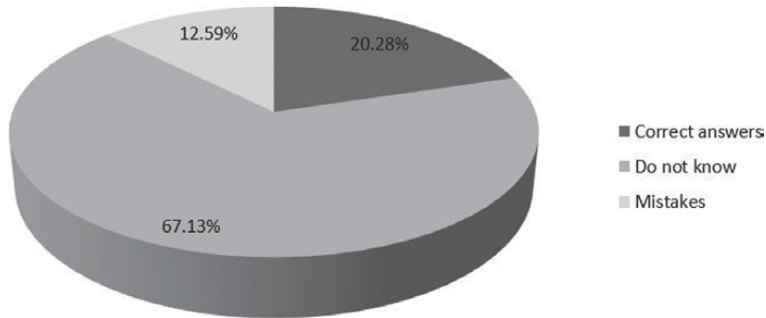
For the pool of questions included in this section, the hit rate stands again at approximately 50 %. Nonetheless, it contrasts with the rate of use of tools such as blogs, cloud computing and social networks, that clearly reflects respondents are in daily contact with new technologies. To gain further insight, it should be assessed how they use these tools, because as shown by several questions, it seems respondents only use them for information purposes and to share content.

#### 4.5. E-mail

In the last section, the aim was to retrieve information about students' knowledge and use of e-mail. Although 81.12 % of the respondents stated they check e-mail every day, more than half the respondents (55.24 %) confirmed they do not

use mail clients such as Outlook or Thunderbird. 99.3 % of the students affirmed that they knew how to attach a file to an e-mail. By contrast, only 20.28 % of the respondents were able to indicate the meaning of Cc and Bcc (cf. Fig. 9).

### What is the meaning of Cc and Bcc?



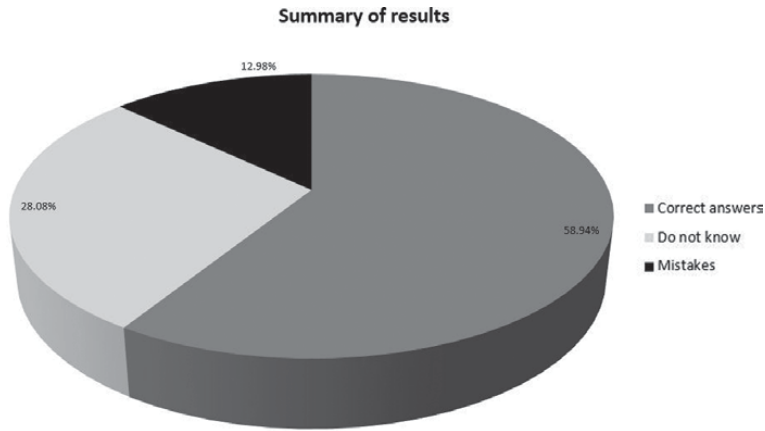
**Fig. 9.** Results for question “What is the meaning of CC and BCC in e-mails?”

These results show that e-mail has become a means of communication, but according to these answers respondents only use some of the features provided by the web browsers. It would have been interesting to obtain information about e-mail management, for example, to draw further conclusions.

#### 4.6. Quantitative findings of results

Before proceeding with the final discussion, it is necessary to offer a comprehensive overview of the results here presented. To summarise them, questions whose results can be categorised as “Correct answers”, “Do not know” and “Mistakes” will be distinguished from questions related to students’ use of technologies.

For the first group of questions, the results are summarised in Fig. 10:



**Fig. 10.** Summary of results

A hit rate of almost 59 % might seem to be a reassuring figure, however in order to evaluate this information properly, these results need to be examined according to the degree of difficulty of the specific skill evaluated in each question.

Most of the students showed a positive attitude to technologies and when asked about very global knowledge the hit rate is quite high:

- Around 80–99 % of the students could identify their operating systems, typical file extensions such as .docx, .jpg, .mp3 and .pdf, and some of the most used keys on the keyboard (enter or backspace).
- Between 60–79 % of the respondents were able to identify files with .pptx and .txt extensions, the tab key and hyperlinks in websites, knew how to convert .doc files into .pdf files, and recognised some shortcuts for word processors (copy/paste).
- Between 50–60 % of the students could name a search engine other than Google, could identify zipped files, knew the shortcuts for bold and cut in word processors, and knew how to use the Alt Gr key.

On the other hand, it can be seen how the hit rate decreases to 50 % or less when students were asked about more complex knowledge or less commonly used tools:

- Approximately 40 % of the respondents could not identify Excel files.
- 65 % of the respondents confused the shift key with the caps lock key.
- The questions about keyboard shortcuts had a hit rate of around 37 %-49 %.
- Only 48 % of the respondents knew the file format of websites.
- The use of quotation marks in search engines was only known by 40 % of the respondents.
- The search and replace feature of Word processors was known and used by fewer than 40 % of the respondents.
- Only 46 % of the respondents affirmed they can install software on their own without problems.

Regarding more complex features, the hit rate decreases to 30 % or less:

- Only 28 % of the respondents could identify hidden formatting symbols in word processors.
- 17 % of the students knew how to convert .doc files into .rtf.
- The insertion of Spanish quotation marks was only familiar to 25 % of the respondents.
- Only 20 % of the students knew the meaning of Cc and Bcc.
- Only 25 % of the respondents knew how to insert a table of contents in Word and just 9 % of them knew how to compare two files.

Concerning questions related to students' use of technologies, the survey results have confirmed that the email, the Internet and mobile phones are parts of their lives. Almost 94 % of the respondents use at least two different devices every day. However, according to the above analysis of correct answers, it has been demonstrated that a large number of the students have only mastered basic skills. Furthermore, despite this exposure to new technologies, 84.62 % of the respondents consider their global IT skills to be average or low. Keeping in mind the clear lack of homogeneity among respondents (a fact that at the same time could be applicable to any group of students), it is possible to conclude that the regular use of new technologies such as mobile phones or computers does not involve the acquisition of advanced IT skills.

## **Concluding remarks**

The main objective of the study here presented was to assess the IT skills of incoming first-year students in the Translation and Interpreting Degree at the University of Málaga, in order to verify whether this sample actually has

advanced computer competences, and whether the skill level they have can be considered a solid basis for developing the translator's computer competences.

Before proceeding with these concluding remarks, it must be noted that this was a purposive sampling, not a random sample, so before applying statistical inference, the information here provided should be contrasted with similar studies performed in other centres, or using a different sample. Nonetheless, the sample size allows us to answer the research questions raised and the study provides very interesting conclusions regarding the preconceptions about the skills incoming students should master.

In relation to the first research question of the study, which asked if the computer knowledge of the sample is sufficient to start working directly with translation tools, it can be concluded that, even if the students surveyed have revealed average instrumental skills in the use of general hardware and software, word processors, the use of Internet and e-mail, there are still some training gaps that should be addressed before they start working with translation tools. Although it has been shown that most of them have mastery of IT fundamentals, they continue to be unfamiliar with many procedures and features.

With regard to the second research question, which asked if it really makes sense to include a course covering IT fundamentals during the bachelor's degree, it is clear that according to the answers to the previous questions, the inclusion of this course is completely justified. It can then be confirmed that the syllabus of the course "Computer Tools Applied to Translation and Interpreting" at the University of Málaga is suitable to fill the gaps revealed by the survey. The content proposed for this course (mentioned in the section "Contextualisation of the study and research questions") provide students with the foundations needed to start developing the translator's instrumental competence. Nonetheless, as the results have revealed, the trainer will find very different levels of knowledge that must be taken into consideration when programming the educational content.

Furthermore, the changing nature of new technologies and hence of the instrumental competence makes it essential not to limit these skills to this course. On the one hand, the use of the computer should be encouraged not only in modules directly related to IT, but also in the translation classroom, where the learners can integrate what they have learned when they are translating a text, that is, during the translation process. For example, in a course covering the introduction to translation, the trainer can make use of CAT tools to translate simple texts and start using features such as word counts or concordances. This would ensure horizontal and vertical consistency of curricular content (Li 2016: 293), as well as requiring close collaboration between trainers and students and, of course, between universities and the labour market. As

Alcina-Caudet (2002) pointed out, the frequency in the use of new technologies must be increased to improve students' instrumental skills.

The conclusions drawn from this study bring to light a problem in the education of future translators. Clearly they cannot be considered illiterate in the use of new technologies, but their knowledge of the tools included in the survey does not go beyond the knowledge a person might have, if they use a computer on a daily basis. It is certainly true that they are very skilled in the use of certain technologies, but further research is required in this area to avoid assuming that they have "sophisticated" technological skills. With regard to translator training, this reality should be taken into account when programming the content of courses and further reflection on the technological skills students should have when entering university must be encouraged.

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