

## Investigating the Web Search Behaviors of Translation Students: an exploratory and multiple-case study

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### ABSTRACT

While the empirical study of online and offline resources represents a significant area of research in translation studies, research into the use of the web as an external aid of consultation has frequently occupied a secondary position in the investigation of translation processes. Moreover, there are hardly any studies addressing the information behaviors of (student) translators within the domains of library and information science, documentation, user studies, and information literacy, either.

This multiple-case study aims at bridging this gap in the literature by exploring the web searching behaviors of a total of six participants. These include a naturally occurring sample of four postgraduate translation trainees (in their first year of studies), and two professional translators (with different levels of experience) who were recruited for a pilot study. The participants' online search behaviors (embedded in the translation of two popular science texts from Spanish into English) are monitored through the notion of "web search task", which is conceptualized as involving four main information-seeking/problem-solving stages: (a) The *search need*, or recognition of an information need within the context of translation problem solving; (b) the *search goal(s)*, or type(s) of information required to potentially satisfy a specific information need; (c) the *search process*, or online actions carried out within one or more search sessions that may address single or multiple information needs; and (d) the *search outcome*, or type(s) of information potentially used to satisfy a search need, and eventually solve a translation problem. The participants' web search tasks are, in turn, examined in relation to a number of translation task attributes (text type and translation brief) as well as user attributes (translation expertise, web search expertise, and domain knowledge).

The study employs direct observation via screen recording and survey research using two questionnaires (a background questionnaire and an online search report) as well as semi-structured interviewing. Qualitative analyses supported by descriptive statistics are used to process the data and provide a multi-faceted overview of the participants' web search behaviors concerning their depth and range of research, their degree of iterative (repetitive) search behavior, as well as their query construction and query modification patterns, among others.

The main findings of the study suggest that the participants' level of translation expertise had a bearing on their choice of information sources, which, in turn, seemed to affect their degree of iterative online search behavior. A look at task-related factors—in particular the degree of specialization—suggests that increased task complexity (along with increased translation experience) also influenced the participants' choice of resources. Furthermore, task-related attributes appear to have had a bigger impact on the participants' range of search behavior than on their depth of research. In addition, it was possible to observe that the lower the level of web search expertise (and translation expertise), the more basic and unplanned the search

statements and the less sophisticated the refinement of queries. Finally, both domain knowledge and task-related factors appeared to have had a combined effect on the participants' amount and type of information needs. In general, it was noted that the higher the level of perceived domain knowledge, the lower the number of information needs and the less specialized the nature of these needs. Furthermore, both the type of research and the amount of time spent online seemed to have had an impact on translation quality. Overall, the more in-depth the nature of research and the higher the increase in research time, the higher the level of translation quality.

**KEYWORDS:** case study research, documentary research, information literacy, information seeking and retrieval, online information behavior, web searching.

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