Comtec
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The State of AI in Localisation: 2025 Industry Insights

Exploring the evolving role of AI in translation and localisation—insights from expert linguists, industry professionals, and international organisations that use language services.

February 2025

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Introduction from the CEO

At Comtec Translations, we believe in building a better future for the localisation industry—one that values innovation, sustainability, and collaboration. As a proud B Corp company, our mission is to grow sustainably while staying true to our core belief: that people are at the heart of everything we do.

The translation industry has undergone a seismic shift with the rise of AI and technology. These advancements offer incredible opportunities but also come with challenges. At Comtec, we see ourselves not just as adopters of innovation but as partners to the linguists and clients we work with, helping them navigate these changes responsibly.

This is why we've launched this research initiative, the first in what will become an annual review of AI's impact on translation. By asking linguists, industry professionals and international organisations using localisation services, about their experiences, concerns, and hopes, we aim to shape the future of our business in a way that's transparent, inclusive, and informed by the people it affects most.

We hope this report will provide valuable insights into how AI is shaping our industry and offer a roadmap for how we can grow responsibly.

Sophie Howe
CEO and Co-Owner, Comtec Translations

Exec Summary: Top 4 Findings

1. AI adoption and awareness remain uneven across the translation industry

While over half of linguists report regular use of AI in their work, a large portion of international organisations remain unaware that AI may be part of their translation processes.

This uneven adoption reveals a disconnect between those driving technological innovation and those relying on its results.

2. The perceived benefits of AI are speed and efficiency

The primary benefits of AI in translation, according to respondents, are its speed and ability to streamline workflows. Over half of linguists cited speed as a top advantage, and many respondents highlighted its capacity to handle repetitive tasks efficiently.

These strengths position AI as a valuable tool for scaling localisation efforts and tackling high-volume or time-sensitive projects.

3. The perceived risks of AI are poor quality and an over-reliance on technology

While AI's speed and efficiency are clear benefits, respondents raised significant concerns about its risks, particularly in terms of quality and over-reliance on technology.

Over 80% of respondents fear that AI will fail to capture cultural and contextual nuances, leading to subpar translations. There is also a growing sense that the industry is evolving faster than many are comfortable with, creating anxiety about job security and diminishing human accountability.

4. The future is collaborative

The future of translation lies in collaboration between AI and human linguists. While AI offers powerful tools to enhance speed and efficiency in the localisation process, its full potential can only be unlocked when paired with human expertise.

Linguists overwhelmingly called for transparency, training, and support to help them adapt to this new reality. By investing in people as much as technology, the industry can create a future that benefits both clients and linguists.

Methodology:

Our research was designed to explore the impact of AI in the translation industry by gathering insights directly from those at the heart of it—linguists, localisation service users, and industry professionals.

To ensure we were asking the right questions, we collaborated with B Corp insight specialist, **Genevieve Lawrence** (LinkedIn), who helped us shape the survey to uncover the key challenges, opportunities, and concerns surrounding AI adoption.

The survey ran from September to December 2024 and consisted of 33 questions, covering a mix of multiple-choice, ranking, and open-text responses to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights.

In total, we collected **812 responses**, representing a diverse range of perspectives:

- **Professional linguists**, reflecting those most directly impacted by AI in translation workflows.
- **Localisation service users** included a mix of Comtec clients and non-Comtec clients, ensuring a broad view of industry expectations.
- **Industry professionals**, such as staff at translation agencies and agency owners, contributed their expertise on how AI is shaping business models and service delivery.

To gather responses, we fielded the survey to linguists within our network and shared it publicly on LinkedIn, allowing for participation from both Comtec and non-Comtec communities. Similarly, we invited a combination of clients, non-clients, and industry professionals to provide a well-rounded perspective on how AI is being used, perceived, and integrated across the sector.

The survey was not incentivised, ensuring that responses were driven purely by professional interest and experience.

By structuring our research this way, we aimed to provide an accurate, balanced, and meaningful snapshot of AI's evolving role in translation—one that helps inform the next steps for linguists, clients, other international organisations, and the industry as a whole.

Finding 1:

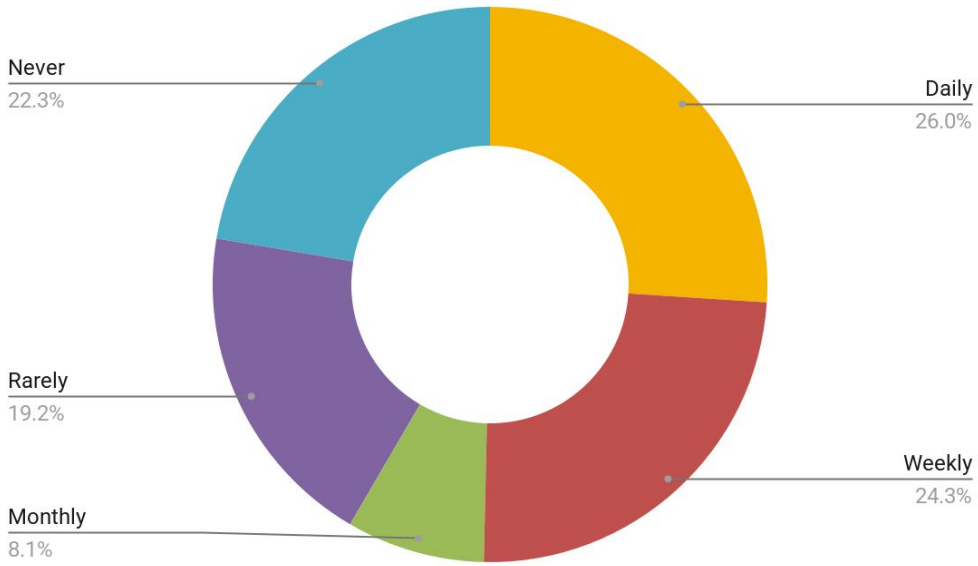
AI adoption and awareness is uneven across the translation industry

Linguists are divided on AI use

Among linguists, AI adoption is nearly perfectly mixed, with **over half** reporting daily or weekly use of AI tools. This demonstrates that many professionals see clear value in integrating these tools into their workflows, particularly for improving efficiency and handling repetitive tasks.

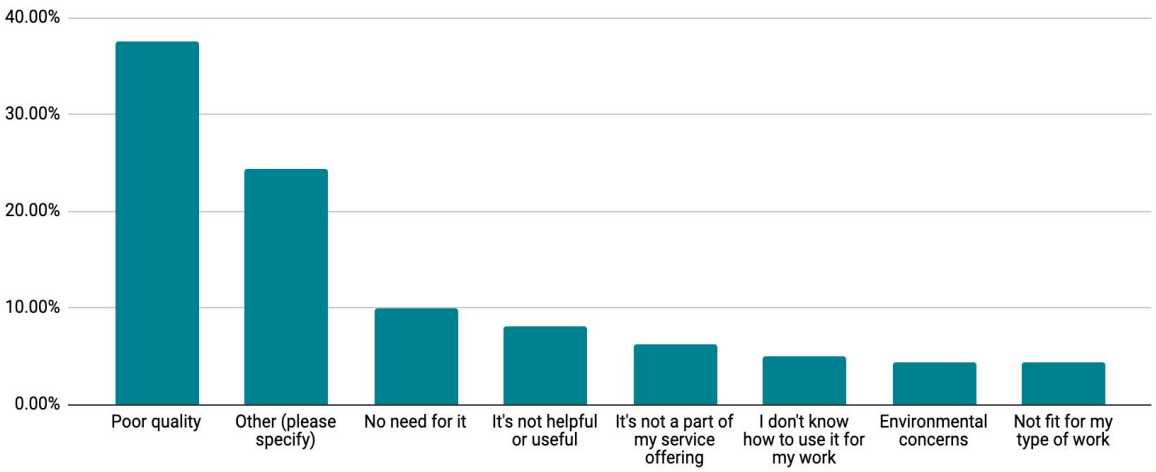
However, there remains a substantial group (**22.35%**) that never uses AI. This suggests barriers like lack of access, inadequate training, or skepticism about its relevance to their work.

Linguists: How frequently do you use AI-powered translation tools in your work?



When exploring the barriers to AI adoption among linguists, quality is the number one stated reason, accounting for over a third of all responses.

Linguists: What's your main reason for never using AI?



The freely stated entries under “Other” are varied and paint a vivid picture of why many linguists resist using AI in their work.

While some highlight specific concerns like **environmental impact**, **data security**, and **copyright infringement**, others reflect a deeper, more emotional opposition rooted in values like **craftsmanship**, **ethics**, and **human creativity**.

Together, these comments reveal that resistance to AI is not simply about technical limitations—it’s about defending the integrity and humanity of the profession itself.

Linguists: What’s your main reason for never using AI?

“I’m a professional voice actor - AI removes the human emotional aspect of reads.”

“GDPR/Privacy concerns.”

“I'm fundamentally opposed to it for job satisfaction reasons.”

“A machine will never replace the human brain. It cannot understand the context, the tone of a dialogue, humour, irony, relationships between characters in the games we translate. The output is not idiomatic and you have to retranslate everything.”

“I'm opposed to it for environmental reasons, copyright reasons, quality reasons, for going against artists and all kinds of workers and for being, essentially, illegal.”

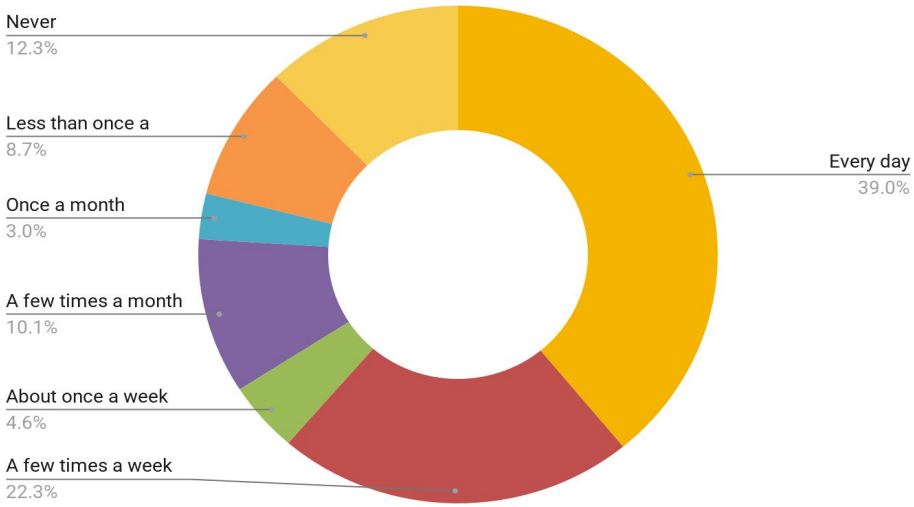
The gap between AI adoption and governance in international organisations

The data shows that AI is becoming an integral part of daily life for many professionals, with **39%** of respondents using AI tools every day and a further **22%** using them a few times a week.

These tools, which include Machine Translation systems and GPT models like ChatGPT, are already shaping workflows and decision-making processes across industries.

AI is used in many different ways. It powers things like Machine Translation, GPT models like ChatGPT, and other day-to-day technologies.

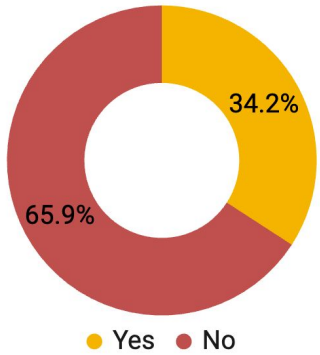
In general, how much do you use these sorts of tools?



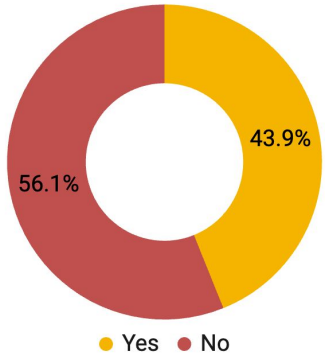
However, this growing reliance on AI is far outpacing the adoption of frameworks to regulate its use. For example, **65.9%** of respondents admitted their business does not have an AI policy in place, and **56.1%** reported lacking an internal validation process for implementing AI solutions.

These gaps highlight a concerning disconnect: while AI tools are being integrated into workflows, many businesses lack the oversight mechanisms needed to ensure their ethical, secure, and effective application.

Do you have an AI policy which regulates its use in your business?



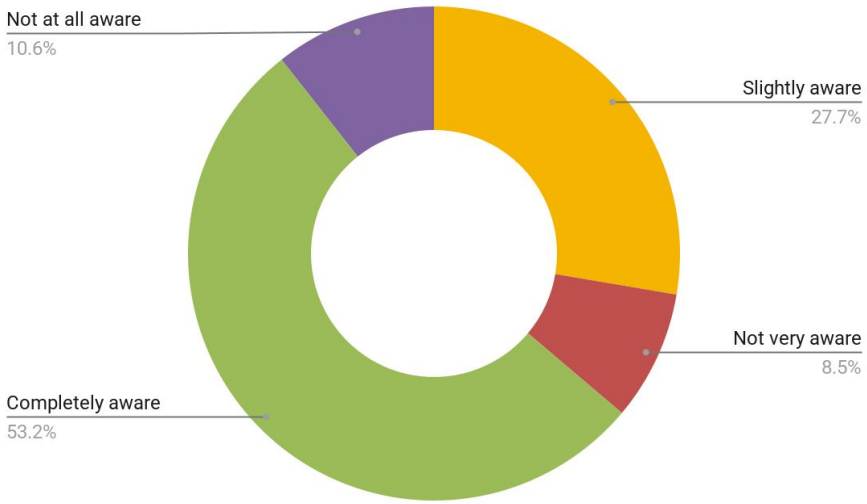
Do you have an internal validation process for implementing AI solutions?



A mixed level of awareness of AI usage in international organisations

For the international organisations that use localisation services, the data reveals a mixed picture of awareness regarding AI's role in translation. While **53.2%** of respondents are fully aware that professional translation companies use AI, nearly **20%** report limited or no awareness of its involvement in powering services like machine translation. This highlights a knowledge gap among organisations, many of whom may be benefiting from AI without fully understanding how it is being applied to their projects.

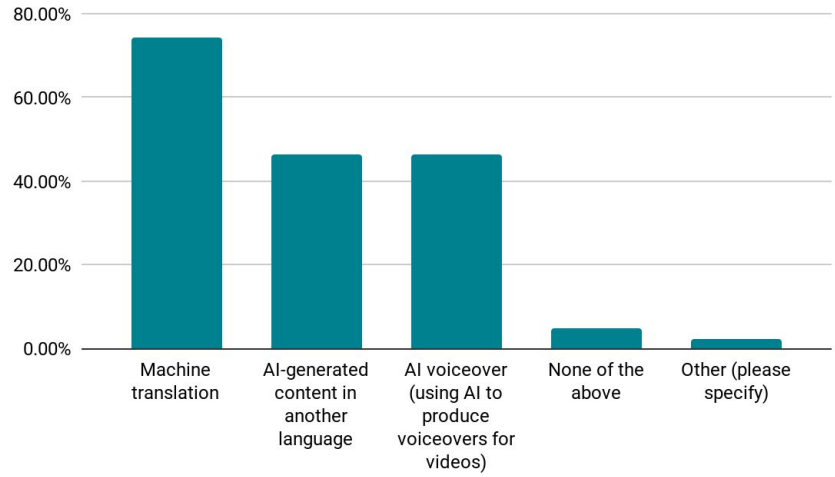
Are you aware that AI may be used by professional translation companies, for example, in powering machine translation?



When asked about specific AI-enabled services, **74.42%** of respondents identified machine translation as the most familiar application. However, awareness drops significantly for other services, such as **AI-generated content in another language** and **AI voiceovers**, which were each recognised by **46.51%** of respondents.

This suggests that while machine translation is widely associated with AI, the broader potential of these tools in areas like voiceovers or multilingual content creation remains less understood.

Clients: Which AI-enabled translation services are you most aware of?



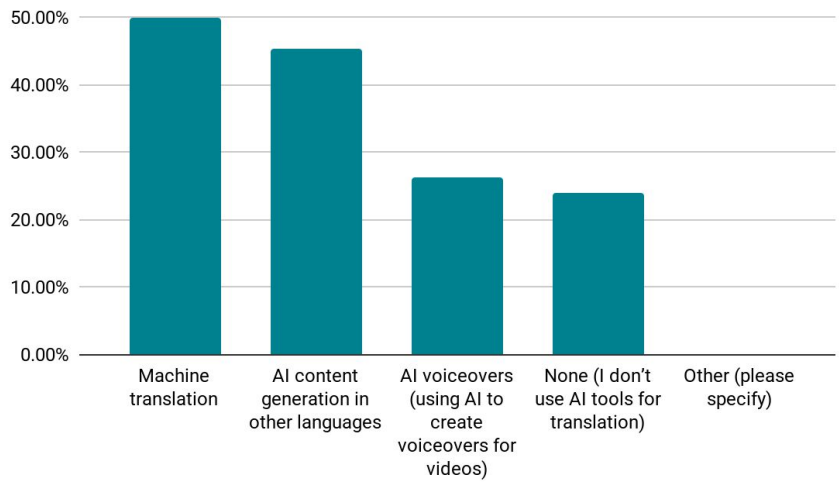
Awareness is correlated with adoption in international organisations

The data shows a clear alignment between awareness and usage of AI-enabled translation services, with **machine translation (MT)** leading the way as both the most widely recognised (**74.42% awareness**) and the most commonly used (**50% adoption**) tool.

However, usage of other services, such as **AI content generation in other languages** and **AI voiceovers**, is significantly lower (**45.24%** and **26.19%**, respectively), mirroring their more limited awareness.

This suggests that awareness directly influences adoption, with organisations gravitating toward the tools they understand best.

Clients: Which AI-enabled translation services have you used, purchased or considered in your localisation process?



Bringing international organisations up to speed on AI use

The uneven awareness among respondents points to an opportunity for LSPs to educate their clients about the capabilities, benefits, and limitations of AI-powered tools. By fostering transparency and providing clear explanations of how AI is integrated into their workflows, LSPs can help clients make more informed decisions about the technologies they choose to leverage.

Additionally, increasing awareness of less familiar AI applications could open up new opportunities for clients to enhance their localisation strategies in creative and impactful ways.

For the industry, building client understanding is not just a matter of good communication—it's a chance to strengthen trust and position AI as an integral yet well-managed part of the translation process.

Finding 2:

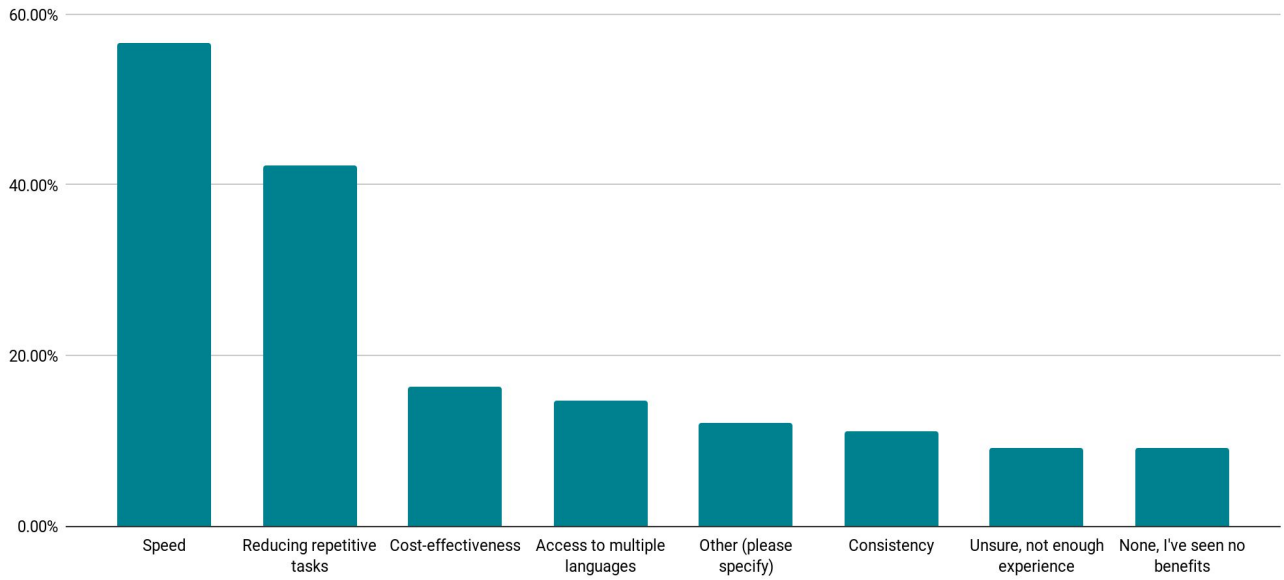
The perceived benefits of AI are speed and efficiency

For linguists, speed and efficiency are key benefits of AI

The research shows that linguists see several key benefits of AI, particularly in areas like **speed** (**56.59%**) and **reducing repetitive tasks** (**42.31%**). Free-text responses reinforce this, with many highlighting how AI can serve as a helpful tool for **brainstorming**, **offering alternative phrases**, and **aiding terminology research**. Linguists note that AI can provide a useful starting point, sparking ideas or helping to refine translations by offering options they might not have considered.

AI is also seen as a time-saver for straightforward tasks like formatting or translating repetitive content, allowing linguists to focus on the more creative or complex aspects of their work. Comments like *"it helps enrich my word choice"* and *"it provides a rough draft to build upon"* reflect an emerging narrative: AI can complement human expertise by streamlining certain steps in the process.

Linguists: For those who use AI, in your experience, what are the main benefits of using AI in translation?



"Other" reasons given:

"It can suggest alternative meanings. Like a proofreader."

"To provide a first, rough translation that can be worked on and improved."

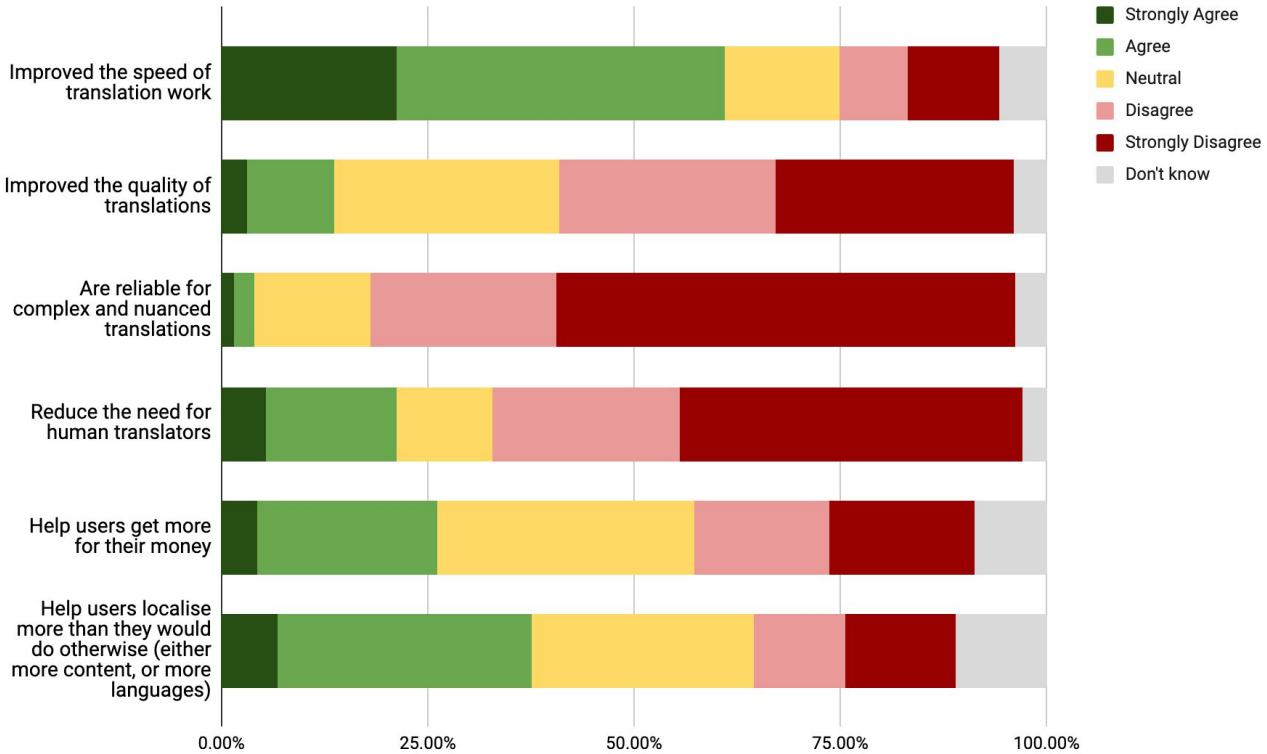
"It reduces typing work. 90% of the output still needs editing, but usually parts of the suggested translation can be used. Thus of course it increases the speed and it allows you to focus on the more creative part of translation."

The general perception: AI drives speed

The data reinforces a central theme: **speed** is perceived as the primary benefit of AI in the translation industry. A combined **60.98%** of respondents either "agree" or "strongly agree" that AI tools have improved the speed of translation work. This aligns with the broader narrative that AI enables faster workflows, making it an attractive tool for those clients and linguists alike who value efficiency, particularly for high-volume or repetitive tasks.

Another insight is the role AI is playing in **expanding localisation efforts**. Nearly **38%** of respondents agree that AI tools enable users to localise more content or more languages than they would otherwise. This suggests that AI is acting as a tide that lifts all boats in the localisation space, enabling businesses to scale their content strategies. For linguists, this could signal increased demand for expertise in refining and adapting AI-generated translations.

All respondents: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about AI's use within the translation industry?



However, skepticism remains around AI's reliability for **complex or nuanced translations**, with only **4%** agreeing it is dependable in these cases. This underscores the enduring importance of human translators for high-stakes, creative, or specialised projects.

Similarly, a **majority disagrees or strongly disagrees** that AI reduces the need for human translators, reinforcing the view that AI complements, rather than replaces, professional linguists.

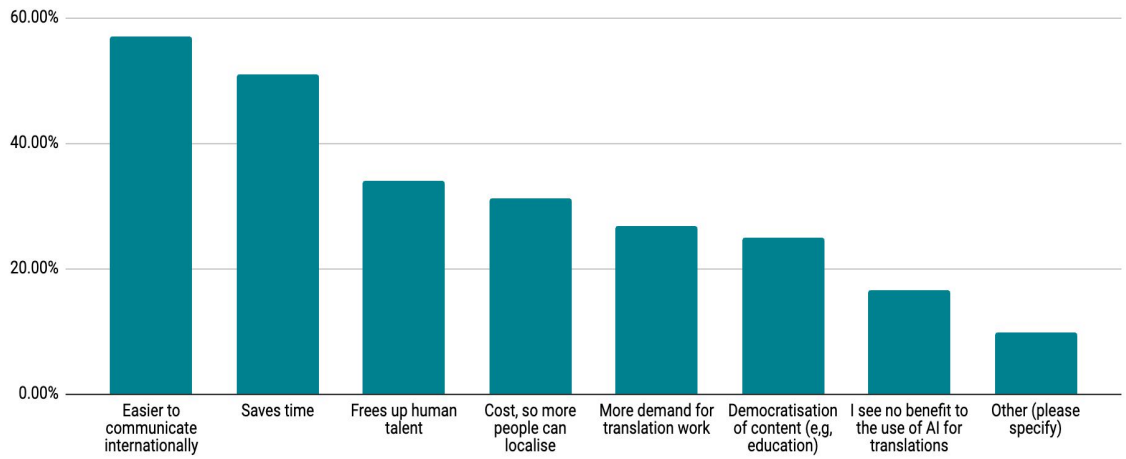
Unlocking opportunities: How AI could reshape translation accessibility

As we've seen, AI is widely regarded as a transformative force for the translation industry, with **56.8% of linguists, international organisations and clients citing easier global communication** and **50.9% recognising time savings** as major advantages. There is also optimism that AI can **democratise access** to education, science, and healthcare by making translation more affordable, enabling organisations with limited budgets to localise their content.

The potential to **free up human talent for creative and strategic tasks**, mentioned by **34%**, reflects an opportunity for professionals to shift away from repetitive, time-consuming work toward value-driven contributions. Additionally, **26.8% of respondents believe AI could increase demand for translation work** as the volume of translated and AI-generated content grows.

Overall, the data depicts AI as a rising tide that enhances localisation by increasing both accessibility and efficiency.

Thinking about opportunities, what advantages, if any, do you think the use of AI offers when it comes to translations?



"Other" reasons stated:

"AI offers a wonderful opportunity for people travelling around the world or people who need a basic translation of a text written in a foreign language. For translators it simply makes it possible to save quite a lot of time in the process of translating a text. In practically every text, however, the human element is very important."

"If translations are properly managed by a trusted organisation (Wikipedia?) it could contribute to world peace. Seriously!"

Finding 3:

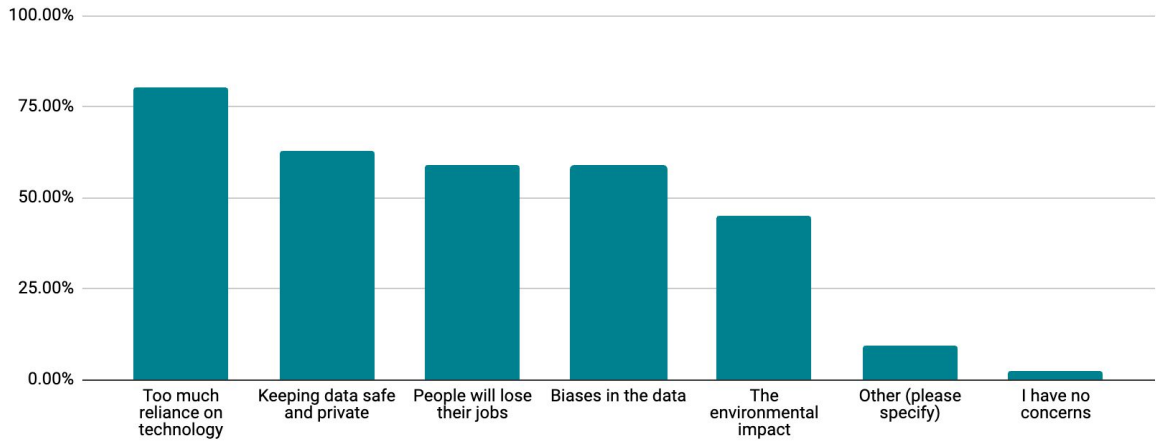
The perceived risks of AI are poor quality and an over-reliance on technology

Navigating concerns: General AI worries vs. translation-specific challenges

General concerns about AI focus on **over-reliance on technology**, noted by 80.2% of respondents, alongside worries about **data privacy** (62.3%) and **job displacement** (59%). Many also flagged **bias in AI-generated content** (58.5%) and the **environmental toll of AI systems** (44.9%).

These highlight broader anxieties about how AI is reshaping industries and everyday life without clear frameworks to address these risks.

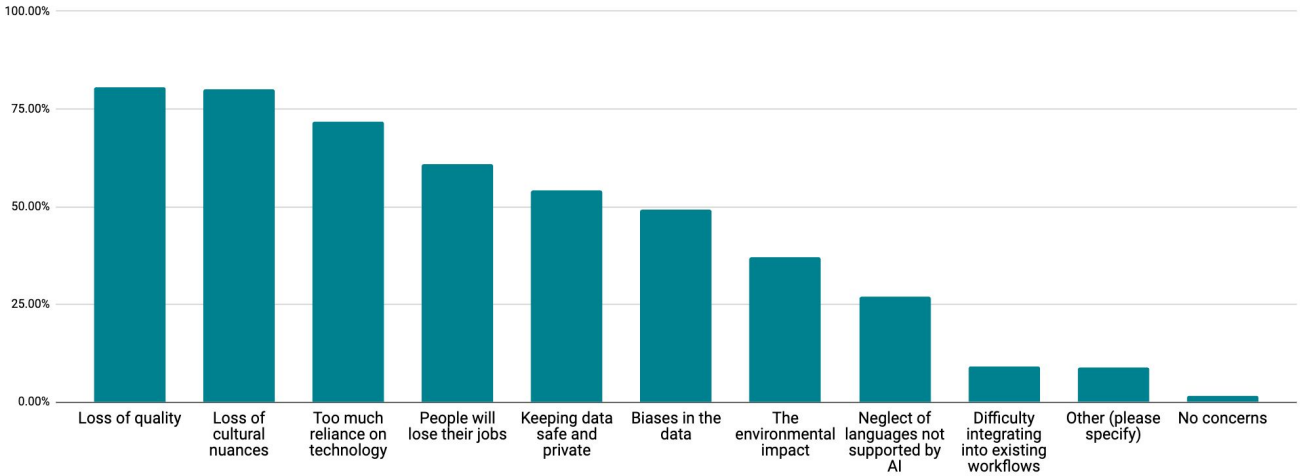
The news often reflects much debate about the general use of AI in daily life. What concerns, if any, do you have about its use?



In translation services, concerns are more specific but echo similar themes. The potential loss of **translation quality** (80.5%) and **cultural nuances** (80.1%) stand out as top worries. **Over-reliance on technology** (71.7%) and **job displacement** (60.8%) remain pressing issues, while **data privacy** (54.1%) and **bias** (49.1%) also weigh heavily.

Concerns unique to translation include **neglect of underrepresented languages** (27.1%) and **difficulty integrating AI into existing workflows** (9.1%).

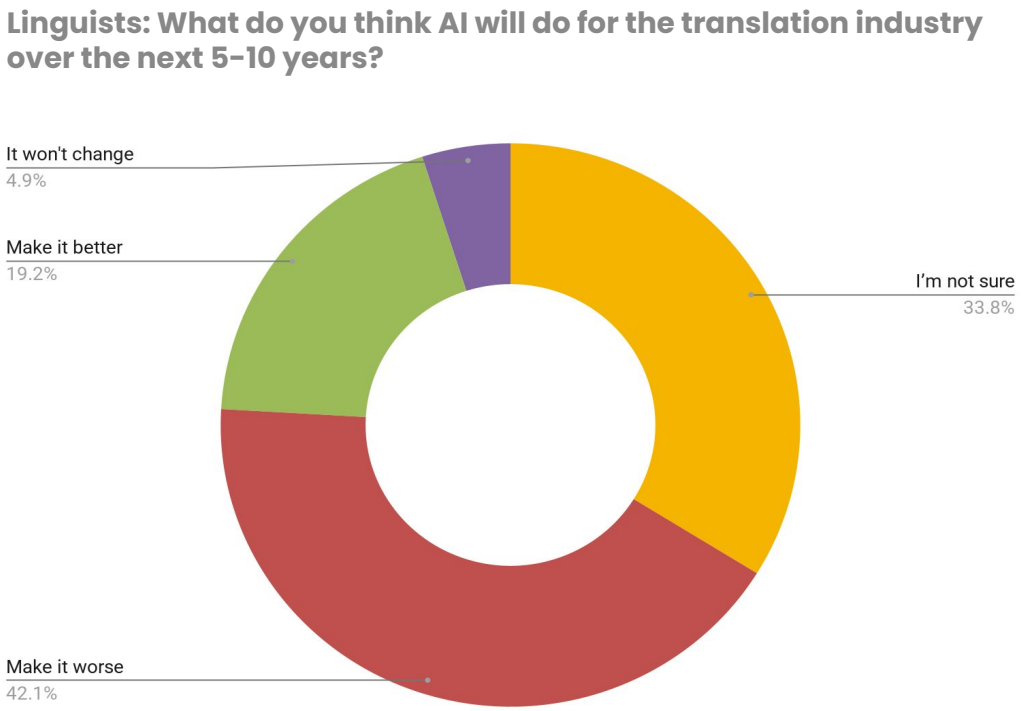
Thinking specifically about using AI for translation services, what concerns, if any, do you have?



Grappling with general pessimism: Linguists' outlook on the industry

The data reveals significant pessimism among linguists about AI's trajectory in the translation industry. While 33.8% of respondents are unsure about AI's long-term impact, the **majority (42.1%) believe it will make the industry worse,** compared to only 19.2% who think it will bring improvement.

This imbalance highlights widespread unease, grounded in real challenges that linguists are already facing as AI becomes more integrated into their workflows.



When asked to elaborate on the ways AI will make the industry worse, the free text answers generally fall into five key themes:

1. Erosion of translation quality

Linguists overwhelmingly fear that reliance on AI will lead to a degradation of translation quality, with clunky, literal outputs replacing nuanced, creative human translations. Many feel that clients will become desensitised to poor quality, setting lower standards for what is acceptable.

> "People are starting to accept mediocrity because it's 'good enough' and/or cheaper. It will greatly impact the quality of all texts around us (it's already starting to)."

> "The poignant part of the texts (the core, the human part), is disappearing."

2. Economic pressures on translators

AI is seen as a force driving down rates, increasing workloads through low-paid MTPE, and devaluing translators' skills. Many linguists report having already faced income erosion and fear the situation will worsen as clients expect faster, cheaper outputs without recognising the human effort required to ensure quality.

"Rates will continue to drop, and professionals won't be able to turn out quality projects for the amount they are paid."

"I am expected to edit AI-generated content instead of translating. The end result is worse AND I am paid less per hour."

3. Dehumanisation and loss of creativity

Linguists lament that translation is being reduced to a mechanical, soul-draining process focused on efficiency over artistry. Many express frustration that MTPE removes the joy of crafting high-quality, creative translations, pushing translators into roles that feel like "content validators."

"The need for human translators will change deeply our work, translators do not translate anymore they validate the AI-powered work, check the content need to be tech savvy as AI for translation needs training, we become content validators spending most of our time on technology"

"The human factor and the use of the full gamut of linguistic nuances in texts will completely disappear."

"Translation is NOT a mundane task. It is a highly skilled and creative task."

"We're selling our souls and impoverishing the richness of language for the sake of capitalism."

4. Job losses and industry destabilisation

A significant number of linguists worry that AI will displace them entirely, making the profession unsustainable. Many describe how current trends are forcing skilled translators out of the industry and fear the loss of expertise will leave the field dominated by untrained or underpaid workers.

"Fewer translators will be needed, and those remaining will continue working for lower rates in order to survive."

"This occupation is under huge threat. The quality will decrease, and young people will have no correct texts to rely on."

"The industry is already becoming unsustainable. Many seasoned translators are leaving because they can't make ends meet."

5. Lack of regulation and ethical concerns

Many respondents highlight a lack of oversight in how AI is being adopted. Concerns include data privacy, copyright infringement, environmental impact, and AI's use as an excuse to cut corners without proper accountability for quality.

"There's no proper regulation, and the main reason behind the push for AI is to make money for AI companies, not for the benefit of translators or clients."

"I would never use a 'tool' that steals from authors without their consent."

"AI generates an unnecessary waste of natural resources as well. All these points are really important to bear in mind if you are committed to growing ethically, sustainably, and responsibly."

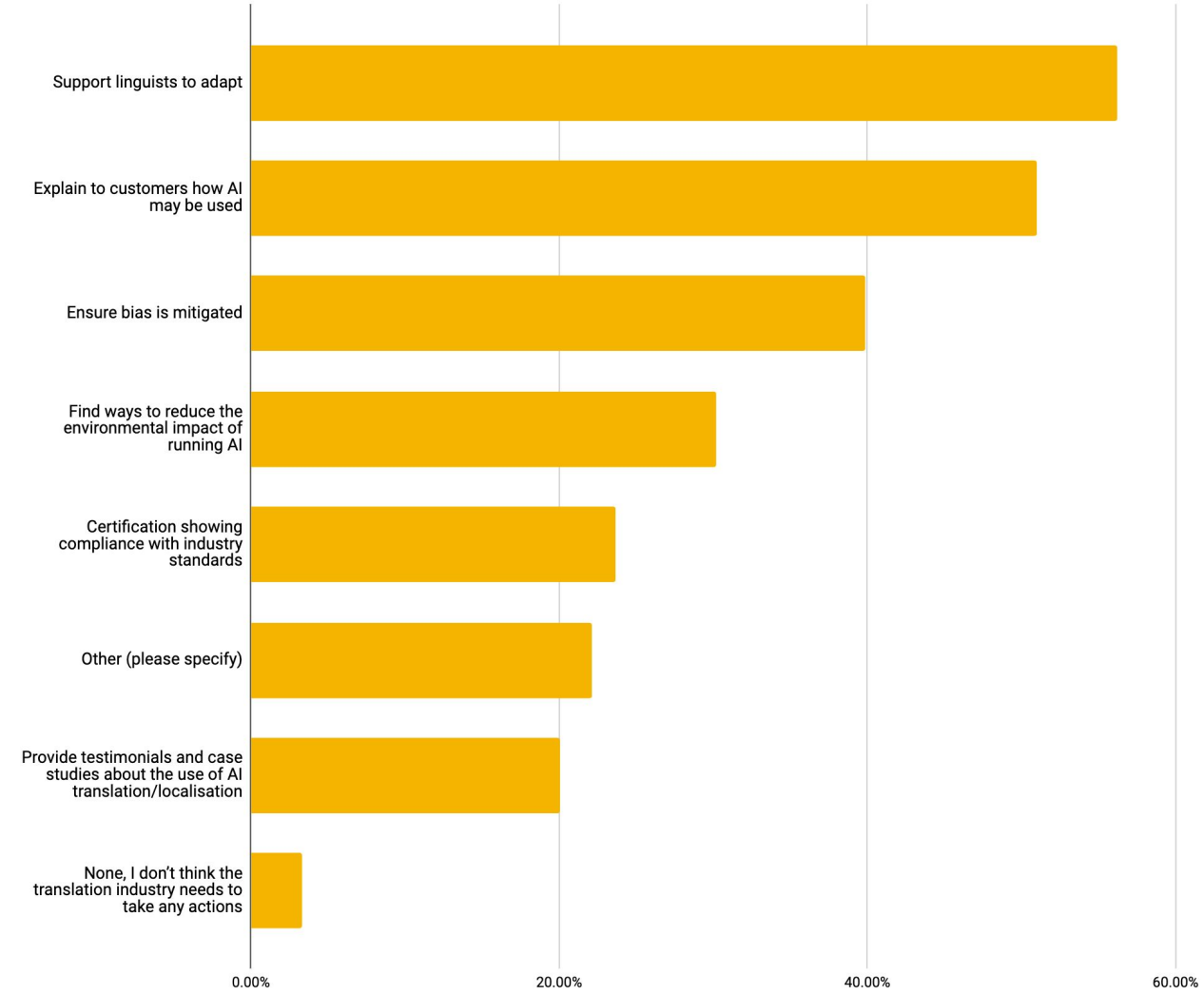
Finding 4:

The future is collaborative

Supporting adaptation and building trust: A shared vision for AI

Across linguists, industry professionals and international organisations using language services, one clear consensus emerges: the translation industry must take proactive steps to navigate AI's growing influence responsibly and inclusively.

Which, if any, of the following actions should translation companies take to ease your concerns about the use of AI?



Over half of respondents (**56.2%**) identified supporting linguists to adapt to AI as a critical action point, aligning closely with earlier findings highlighting linguists' concerns about their evolving roles.

Transparency with international businesses using our services is also a priority, with over half of respondents **(50.9%)** calling for clear explanations of how AI is integrated into translation services. This mirrors the earlier theme of client awareness gaps, where many were either unaware of AI's role in translation workflows or uncertain about its capabilities.

Efforts to mitigate bias **(39.9%)** and reduce AI's environmental impact **(30.2%)** also reflect a growing awareness of ethical and sustainability concerns, which were key themes in discussions about general AI use.

What support do linguists want?

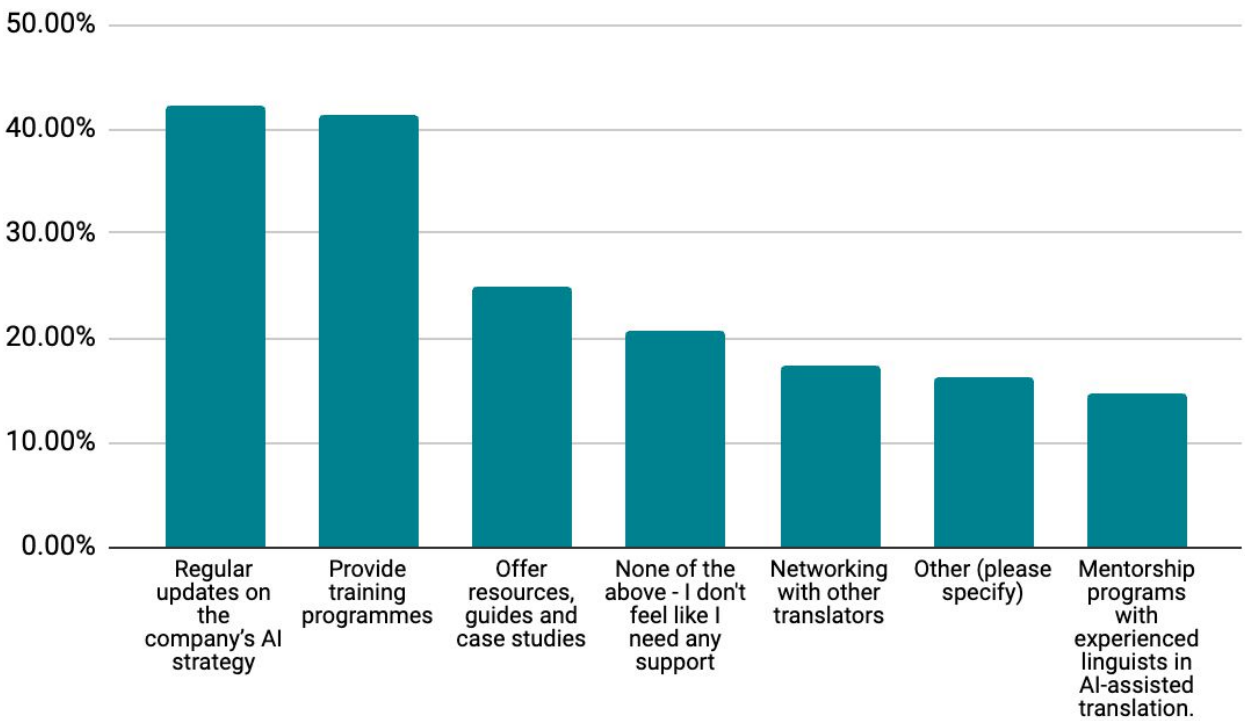
Linguists are clear about what they need to adapt to AI's evolving role in the translation industry: transparency, training, and resources.

The top two priorities—regular updates on companies' AI strategies **(42.2%)** and training programmes **(41.4%)**—highlight a strong desire for both clarity about how AI is being integrated and practical tools to navigate this shift. These findings align with earlier themes around the need to support linguists in adapting their skills while preserving the value of human expertise in the process.

Interestingly, one in five linguists **(20.7%)** stated they don't feel the need for support, suggesting a segment of professionals who either feel confident in their existing skills or are less inclined to engage with AI-driven workflows. For the majority, however, structured resources like guides and case studies **(25%)** are seen as valuable, providing real-world context for how AI tools can be successfully integrated into professional practice.

Networking opportunities **(17.4%)** and mentorship programmes **(14.7%)** further reflect the importance of community-driven learning. Translators often work independently, and connecting with peers or experienced mentors can help them share strategies, address challenges, and build confidence in navigating new technologies.

Linguists: What actions would you like translation companies to take to help you adapt to AI's evolving role in the industry?

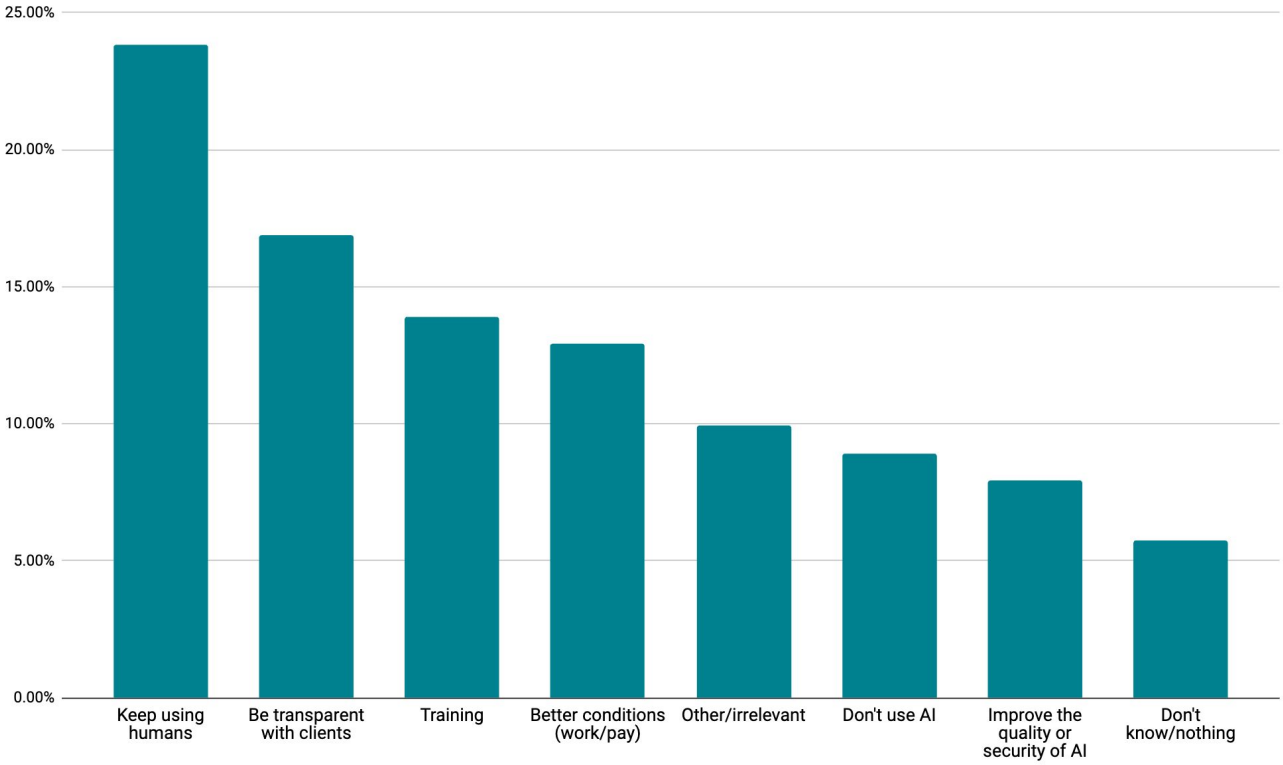


Linguists speak: Key actions LSPs must take

Following on from our prompted question, we asked linguists an open-ended question: *"What is the most important thing translation companies can do to ease your concerns about AI?".*

The responses revealed a wide range of perspectives, but several key themes emerged. Linguists overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of maintaining the value of human expertise, which was mentioned by almost a quarter of all respondents. Other important steps are transparency, training and fairer working conditions.

Considering all the things we just mentioned and any other thoughts you might have, what is the most important thing translation companies can do to ease your concerns?



"Translation companies must continue using qualified, experienced human translators at all stages of the workflow. AI is a tool, not a replacement."

"Make it clear to clients that certain types of content cannot be accurately done without human intervention."

"AI is still prone to errors and misses cultural nuances. It should be used responsibly and only where appropriate."

Conclusion: Embracing the future

AI Is here to stay
At Comtec, we believe the future of translation lies in collaboration—between humans and technology, service providers and global organisations, innovation and tradition. As our research highlights, AI's presence in the translation industry is undeniable. Over half of linguists now use AI tools regularly, and end users are increasingly aware of its integration into workflows. AI has already proven its ability to speed up translation processes and reduce repetitive tasks, but its role is evolving beyond automation. Rather than viewing AI as a disruptor, we see it as an enabler—an opportunity to reimagine how we all work together and deliver value for global organisations.

The changing role of linguists
The role of linguists in this future is pivotal. As our findings show, concerns about AI eroding translation quality and losing cultural nuances are widespread, with over **80% of respondents highlighting these issues**. This reinforces what we have always believed: human expertise is irreplaceable. Linguists bring cultural understanding, creativity, and contextual nuance that no machine can replicate. However, it's clear from the feedback that the shape of this work is changing. Increasingly, linguists will need to collaborate with AI, refining its outputs and ensuring they meet the quality and cultural relevance that clients and audiences expect.

Investing in skills for the future
This transition requires more than just technology; it requires investment in people. Our survey revealed a strong demand for training, with **56% of our linguist respondents** calling for workshops, mentorship, and other support to help them adapt to AI's evolving role. At Comtec, we are committed to answering that call. In 2025, we will introduce AI-focused training programmes designed to empower linguists with the skills they need to thrive in this new reality. These initiatives will ensure that linguists are equipped not only to use AI tools but also to shape and control them, keeping quality and creativity at the heart of the process.

Conclusion: Embracing the future

Transparency as a cornerstone
Transparency emerged as another recurring theme in our research. **51% of respondents** emphasised the importance of clear communication about how and when AI is used. This is an essential step in building trust—not just with clients but also with the linguists we partner with. By being open about AI's role, its benefits, and its limitations, we can foster a collaborative environment where all stakeholders feel informed and valued.

An optimistic, collaborative future
Ultimately, we embrace the changes AI brings because we see a future where it strengthens, not diminishes, the role of human expertise. By harnessing the speed and efficiency of AI and pairing it with the artistry and insight of linguists, we can deliver something greater than either could achieve alone. Our research highlights both the challenges and the opportunities ahead, but it also reinforces our optimism.

This is an exciting time for the translation industry, and we believe the future is bright. By investing in people, maintaining transparency, and fostering collaboration, we can ensure that linguists remain at the heart of the localisation process while delivering cutting-edge solutions to our clients. At Comtec, we're proud to lead with innovation, integrity, and partnership as we move into this new era.

Sophie Howe

CEO and Co-Owner, Comtec Translations

Want to learn more?

If you'd like to discuss any of the topics raised in this report in more detail, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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