

# CAT tools – the literary translator’s new assistant?

*Katja Zakrajšek shares her experiences of working with MT*

## What CAT tools have you used for literary translation?

I’ve used both MemoQ and Trados, mostly the latter. I think they are comparable in terms of functionality for a literary translator. While I also have some experience with OmegaT, I would not use it for literary translation; I find the interface is not suited to that. What you need – at least, what I need – is having the original and the translation side-by-side.

## What kind of texts did you use CAT tools for?

Creative fiction and nonfiction. For verse – especially rhymed verse – I feel the need to go freeform on the page.

## Was it your choice or did a publisher/ employer ask you to use a CAT tool?

It’s entirely my choice. If anything, publishers tend to be surprised – and sometimes even unable to

supply the original in a format that would allow me to use a CAT tool. I may get paper, or scanned copies – whatever was obtained from the agent. It’s all rather 20th century!

## Were you offered any training and did using the tools have any influence on your fees?

I’ve had some training for MemoQ, which is very transferable to Trados, but that was on my own initiative. And I’ve had a lot of peer-to-peer help, mostly from non-literary translators, who are more likely to use CAT tools. My fees have remained the same.

## How do CAT tools affect the quality of your translations and the amount and nature of the work?

I don’t think a publisher would necessarily notice a difference in the end result, but the CAT tools certainly make a difference in the process of



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**Katja Zakrajšek**  
**Photo: Gordana Grlič**

getting there. It's just easier to produce a consistent translation. Sometimes I use glossaries, which are really meant for terminology but work just as well if a literary text has words or phrases that crop up repeatedly. (Or for names, so I don't have to misspell and then correct them a hundred times.) Translation memories help with repetitions and variations as well. Furthermore, a CAT tool makes it easier not to miss bits of text. And for rereading and checking the translation? It's glorious. Finally, I find it's a more ergonomic way of going about translation – a somewhat unexpected but invaluable advantage for me. (Book below screen, book beside screen, two screens: I'd tried them all, with no luck. There's a lot to be said for not being in pain because of your work.) On the other hand, I have lost work to mysterious technical issues with the tool. It's not perfect.

**How common, in your view, is the use of machine translation tools in your field?**

In literary translation, it's not common at all. It's not unheard of – I tried it at the recommendation of another literary translator – but so far, we're a small minority. It may be more common among people who move between literary and non-literary translation.

**How do you see the future of literary translation in the light of CAT tools?**

However helpful CAT tools are, I don't see them revolutionising literary translation even if – or when – they become more widespread. The main tool is still the literary translator's brain, aided and abetted by their peer network and the book's editorial team.