SPECIAL FEATURE:
AI AND LITERARY
TRANSLATION

Counterpoint

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CEATL's European Literary Translators' E-zine

Contents

From the editors

This tenth issue of *Counterpoint* marks a transition in more ways than one – both internally and in terms of content. To address the latter first: as anyone with a computer and interest in the world around them will have noticed, AI – or artificial intelligence – has been on everyone's lips and mind a lot recently, in particular within the field of literary translation. So, to mark our anniversary we decided to make another issue on this ever-evolving topic. *Counterpoint* issue No. 4 dealt with 'machine translation', not least whether the then prominent AI tools could (or could not) be used in literary translation. Although the issue was only published in 2020, much has happened since then and the threat – or opportunity, however you want to see it – of AI is a completely different one today.

As editors of *Counterpoint*, we believe understanding is the first and best way to dispel fears and myths, and since there are a lot of these, we have asked some of the experts within this field to share their knowledge and analyses of the current landscape. We hear from the vice chair of the Council of Europe's Committee on Artificial Intelligence Gregor Strojin, who takes us through the legal implications of generative AI in relation to copyright. Assistant Professor of Literary Translation at the University of Vienna Waltraud Kolb tells us of the latest developments in the 'unlikely frontier' between literary translation studies and computational linguistics, while PhD student at the University of Liège Damien Hansen explains the terminology of the field, asking if it might be possible to adapt the technology to the needs of literary translators and literature and arguing that we as translators have to make sure there is full transparency in the implementation of this technology.

> ***"We believe understanding is the first and best way to dispel fears and myths"***

In our previous special issue, we asked translators to share their thoughts and experiences on the topic. This time, we wanted to hear from the other halves of the equation, namely the writers being translated: American YA fantasy writer

Brandon Mull, French novelist and National Book Award finalist David Diop and Romanian poet and prose writer (and literary translator) Lavinia Braniște. Since the use of AI is such a complex and quite politicised area, we appreciate the courage it has taken them to voice their views on this topic and for their solidarity with us literary translators. Unless we work together for a more regulated and transparent use of these new technologies, we are sure to lose both rights, work and, in the end, human literary voices communicating with other humans.

Closer to home, we hear from CEATL's president Francesca Novajra on what the European network of translators can and should be doing vis-à-vis AI, while CEATL board member Miquel Cabal Guarro discusses how AI will affect literary translation from and into minoritised languages. And lastly, we get a view from the north, when CEATL's two Icelandic member organisations tell us of their history and their work. A good bet is that AI will still be high on the list of topics at CEATL's AGM in Reykjavik next year.

On a more internal note, the current *Counterpoint* editorial team (including new addition Kaisa Ranta from Finland) is stepping down after five happy years at the helm. We hope you have enjoyed reading the ten issues as much as we have working on them.

Likewise we hope this special issue of *Counterpoint* No. 10 will be both informative and enlightening. As always, any comments, feedback or ideas are very welcome.

***Juliane Wammen** is an award-winning literary translator from English, Norwegian and Swedish into Danish.*

Photo: Tim Flohr Sørensen

***Anne Larchet** is a freelance interpreter and translator from Spanish to English.*

Photo: Martin de Haan

***Kaisa Ranta** is a literary translator from English and German into Finnish.*

Photo: Private archive

***Hanneke van der Heijden** is a literary translator and interpreter from Turkish into Dutch, and writes about literature from Turkey.*

Photo: Private archive

No one, no language and no book left behind

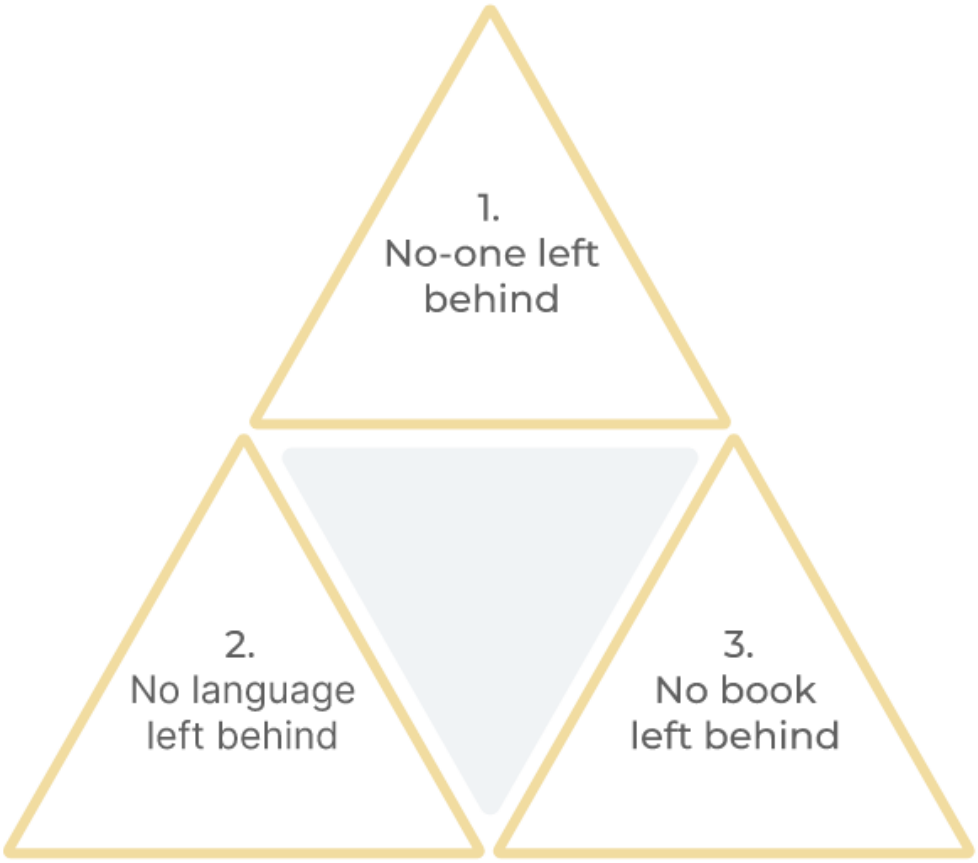
CEATL takes action on AI

Francesca Novajra

These last months, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the subject of major interest and concern not only for literary translators but also for other artists. CEATL has been observing the impact of the rise of AI on the publishing industry and has carried out its own investigations into the issue as well as co-signing statements with sister organisations.

To give you a more detailed timeline: during the General Assembly in Ljubljana last May, our delegates shared their concern about AI, and a new task force was created to shed light on the issue and face the future challenges. Our Slovenian colleagues in DSKP organised an interesting panel discussion 'Literary translation between imagination and botisation' where CEATL was represented by our French delegate Cécile Deniard (ATLF). Afterwards, to get a better picture of the reaction of our member associations to AI technology and to collect data for the AI Task Force, the Working Conditions Group conducted a survey among CEATL members and literary translators all over Europe.

At the end of September CEATL signed a joint statement on AI and the draft of the EU AI Act together with 12 European and international authors', performers' and other creative workers' organisations, urgently calling for a human centric approach to generative AI, built upon informed consent, transparency, fair remuneration and contractual practices, and urging "the European institutions to agree on a balanced regulation that not only forwards the advancement of AI technologies but also promotes original human creativity in our societies and preserves the rights and livelihoods of the authors and artists we represent".



On the occasion of International Translation Day, our board member Miquel Cabal Guarro spoke at the FIT webinar What use the Humanities without humans: the value of human interpreting and human translation in a fragile world, among other things explaining what the use of AI may mean for minoritised languages – something Guarro goes into in more detail elsewhere in this issue.

The debate that began in Ljubljana led the AI Task Force to work on a statement on CEATL's behalf. The starting point is our legal demands, because protecting authors' copyrighted material from AI training is essential, and transparency requirements should be properly enforced.

Following this, the statement clarifies our professional perspective: machines do not translate, they generate texts based on previous textual material. Our fear is that AI usage could standardise translations and impoverish written cultures and languages, for example through priming bias, the tendency to be influenced by the first option that the machine gives us, or through the so-called self-pollution, the machine learning from itself.

Also, we strongly believe that every genre and every language deserve a

***Francesca Novajra** is a literary translator from English and French into Italian. In 2017, she received the FIT Astrid Lindgren Prize. She has been a CEATL delegate for the Italian association AITI since 2013 and was elected president of CEATL in 2023. She lives in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, a border region in the north-east of Italy.*

Francesca Novajra
Photo: Ettore Cecotto

human translation. We warn against the danger of creating a hierarchy of genres, pitting those that are better suited to undergo generative AI processing against others that are not. And we caution against another major risk: that a few hegemonic languages could be used as bridges for translation from or into minoritised languages (relay or indirect translations), endangering linguistic and cultural diversity and homogenising the original text. This would be unethical and unfair for the author as well as for the reader.

Finally, the statement emphasises our humanistic beliefs. Literary translation is not a process of matching one word with another: only humans can understand the subtleties and references of a culture, only humans can doubt and contextualise, thanks to a profound understanding and experience of a particular culture and language.

Translating a book is a creative act, and although bots may have an amazing database, they have neither heart nor sensitivity. We believe that having a clear stance is the first step to preparing for the uncertain future of coexistence between human creativity and generative AI.

> ***"AI usage could standardise translations and impoverish written cultures and languages"***

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

The ambivalence of machine translation and AI

Resource or replacement?

Damien Hansen

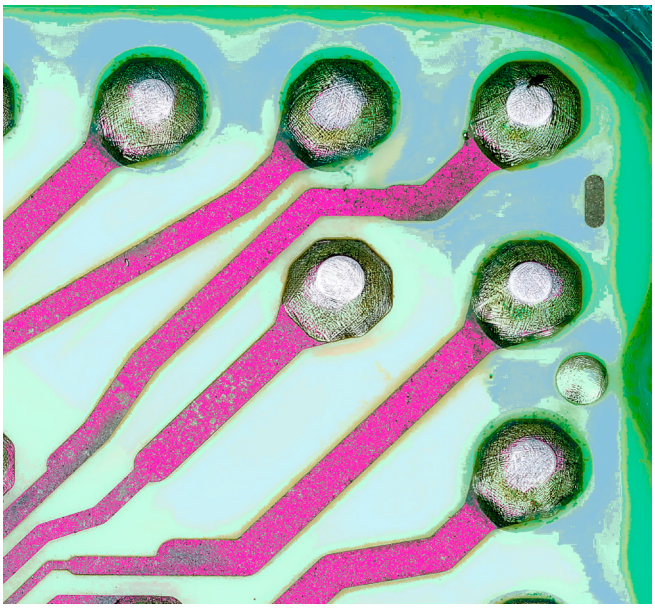
While research on literary machine translation (MT) has gradually brought up the issue, the arrival of large language models (LLMs) and related chatbots seems to have given new momentum to the topic of translation technologies in the literary domain. This could have something to do with publishers now facing the consequences of their arrival directly, with the recent wave of AI-generated scam submissions. Nevertheless, there are now more transparent talks on technology and practices that already existed even if they perhaps did not apply to serious editors and established translators.

A numbers game

Although neural MT systems have reached sufficient quality to be used daily in many tasks and to fuel all sorts of claims about their performance, it is always good to remember that this is still all about numbers: the ones used by machines to represent words and sentences, those that neural networks are made of, but also the amount of data that is used to train such systems, and the number of their parameters that is said to be directly proportional to improved quality. By adopting such a mathematical perspective, we can paint a more nuanced picture of the technology and its capabilities. This can include the fact that existing systems are hardly adapted to the literary domain but could be tailored to literary texts or even an individual translator style, as well as the limitations that even such tools would be subject to.

Although this 'data-driven' approach does work very well in practice, MT engines still handle isolated sentences and cannot have an overall view of a translation. They cannot be expected to understand the text, deal with cultural elements, play with formal constraints

or create accurate neologisms. Nor do they have the sensibility to change the focus or structure of the narrative and adapt to the desiderata of all the actors involved, all of which require critical human thinking. Unless a new paradigm changes the way MT works, it will continue to sometimes struggle with lexical disambiguation and will always stay close to the source. That doesn't mean, however, that it has no future in the literary domain. I know many people use it already (not for post-editing per se, but to jumpstart the translation process when the mind strays, get some ideas, etc.). Furthermore, I have suggested a shift of paradigm in my research whereby professionals could train their own MT system, which would act as one of many other tools in the larger picture of computer-assisted translation.



By Kaisa Ranta, based on a photo by Mister_fr *CC-SA*

Money versus quality

The problem is not so much the tool itself, but rather it being imposed upon professionals and its use for purely economic reasons. Indeed, the traditional use of MT as a first draft can constrain literary translators, their creativity and their voice, as research – and *Counterpoint's* Issue No 4 on this topic – suggests. MT should instead be implemented in a way that does not lead to priming and integrated in an interface that does not prevent the heavy restructuring that is often required, so as not to disrupt the flow of translation and the delicate balance between faithfulness to the source and originality of the target. Failure to do so would have a direct impact on quality and style. Not only translator style, but also conventions of the genre. For instance, I work on fiction, which I found to be particularly complex for machines as it involves a characteristic lexicon, frequent wordplay, neologisms and variations in tone that machines are not able to reproduce. Nevertheless, the apparent quality of MT and potential monetary gains are such that it is bound to become increasingly commonplace.

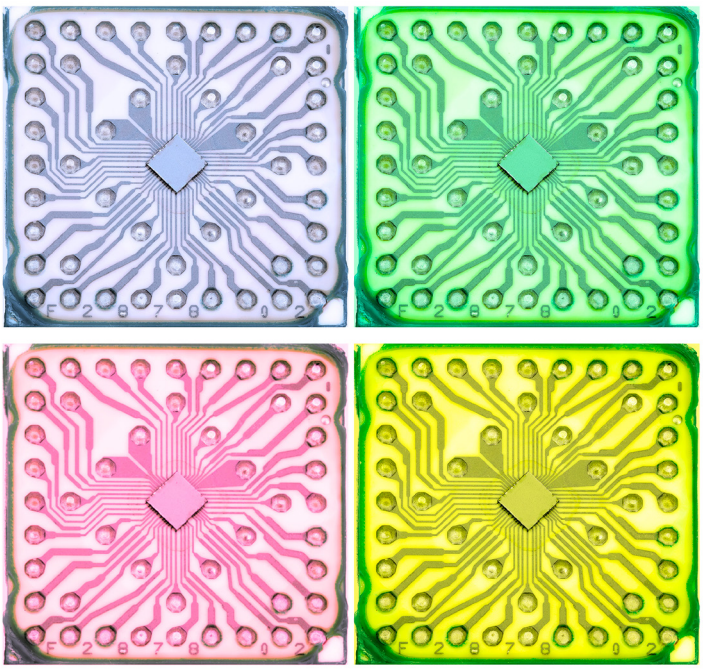
Bigger systems, bigger scope, bigger concerns

The arrival of LLMs is somewhat interesting in the sense that it now extends the discussion that translators were already having concerning machine translation to a much larger public. Essentially, they rely on the same technology as MT tools, but on an exponentially larger scale. While MT is trained with task-specific parallel corpora, the ability of LLMs to handle multiple tasks and languages has to do with the amount of training data being so unimaginably vast that it is bound to contain examples of languages other

than English, examples of code, etc. They do exhibit unintended capabilities, however, bringing about new uses and new concerns. As far as translation is concerned, I would argue that the jury is still out. On the one hand, LLMs have the ability to work at paragraph level rather than the sentence level of MT. On the other hand, in my experience, they produce calques and basic errors not found in MT. However, there might be some interesting uses in their capacity to rephrase or output something in a different style, for instance, in keeping with the idea of using tools to compare solutions and provide translators with varying alternatives.

> *"We ideally need to rethink technology and its implementation"*

Given that both MT and LLMs make use of neural networks, they exhibit the same limitations. One of the differences with previous paradigms that is notably overlooked but has come to light with the latest generation of chatbots is that these neural-based applications produce seemingly fluent outputs, but are prone to hallucinating, omitting information or distorting meaning. And these mistakes are much harder to spot, especially to the untrained eye. Due to their increased need in training data and wider range of applications, however, LLMs also raise larger ethical issues that are not limited to the language industry.



By Kaisa Ranta, based on a photo by Mister_fr *CC-SA*

Ergonomics, data & fair pay

I have already touched upon the design constraints related to the integration of MT, but both technologies pose a risk first and foremost to the status and remuneration of translators, as there is a general lack of accountability and regulation around their use. This is especially true for large language models, whose development, as mentioned, requires much, much more data. Indeed, these vast quantities of data automatically scraped from the Web are bound to include protected content which is freely available online. Far more disconcertingly, entire repositories of copyrighted books are actively collected to create massive datasets which are crucial to the fluent, creative and well-turned output that makes them so successful. I would not be surprised, therefore, if literary-adapted MT engines were to arrive in the near future.

***Damien Hansen** is finishing a PhD in translation studies at the University of Liège (CIRTI) and in computer science at the Grenoble Alpes University (GETALP). His project focuses on the possibility of adapting MT engines to individual literary translators and on the ergonomic aspects of such a tool in the larger context of computer-assisted literary translation.*

Damien Hansen
Photo: Private archive

In this rapidly evolving context, translators will have to make a case to ensure that MT be implemented – should this happen – in a way that is transparent and voluntary, that does not infringe on their rights, and that aims to support rather than hinder the creative process. Moreover, they should receive fair compensation if their work is used to train new systems. Associations and unions will have an important role to play in that matter, as well as authors who are also at risk.

One such solution would be to revise contracts so as to prevent further use outside the scope of the publication, as the voice acting industry is suggesting, even though the distribution of e-books makes this difficult. We ideally need to rethink technology and its implementation in a way that aims to support rather than replace. This is best done by focusing on the dialogue between human and machine, on less invasive integrations for MT, on the ability to summon the system on demand, on providing multiple solutions for a segment instead of a single pass on the entire text, etc. If anything, this entire discussion does serve to highlight the added value of human translation, whether literary or not, and should aim to ensure that machines work for humans instead of humans working for machines.

AI is an umbrella term for many approaches dating back to the mid-20th century. The underlying aim of this research field is to create a machine that could artificially solve a broad range of tasks commonly associated with human intelligence.

Chatbots are one way to interact with large language models. We know them best as virtual assistants on websites answering requests based on pre-coded rules, but the text-generation capabilities of LLMs makes them especially suited for this use as conversational agents. ChatGPT is illustrative of the latest LLM-powered generation of chatbots in its aim to become an integrated assistant and in its ability to handle a broad range of tasks, including some unanticipated by its developers, due to the massive quantities of data involved.

Deep learning is a branch of machine learning, which itself is a branch of AI. Where machine learning aims to resolve specific tasks by learning from data, deep learning revolves around the use of neural networks to process this data and perform the task. Its name actually comes from the number of layers in the network (deeper meaning more layers and more complex tasks), but the term AI is often used synecdochically today as a substitute for deep learning and associated tools, thereby reinforcing the hype.

Large language models (LLMs) are another product of deep learning, mainly trained on monolingual text data and focused on word prediction. Similarly to machine translation, which also involves language modelling, LLMs make use of neural networks, but on a much larger scale. Where we typically talk about millions of words to train MT systems made of a comparable number of parameters (roughly equating to how big and how deep the model is), LLMs are now estimated in billions of parameters and their training data in trillions of words.

Machine translation (MT) is, before all else, a tool. Multiple approaches have been used to build such systems (rule-based, statistical, neural), with the latest generation of tools now leveraging the advances of deep learning. Although these neural systems are commonly presented as a radical shift of paradigm, the idea remains very similar to the preceding statistical approach in its use of probabilistic methods and large parallel corpora for training. These data-driven approaches, on the other hand, mark a definitive change in comparison with the carefully hand-crafted rules of first-generation systems.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

WRITERS ON AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

Musings on AI translation

Brandon Mull

Words are an imperfect means of communication. When creating a story, I experience a vivid spectacle in my mind – extraordinary people, grand adventures with weighty consequences, failure and triumph, heartache and humor – elements I must simplify and shrink down into a primitive code called the English language. I labor over my words with the desire to convey the maximum meaning with the limited options granted by my vocabulary. Despite my best efforts, every time a story moves from a vision in my mind to words on a page, fidelity to the original vision is lost.

Fiction is the study of the human heart and mind through the portrayal of characters navigating imagined scenarios. Although the pathways of the mind and the feelings of the heart are too complex to be effectively reduced to words, we strive to create an approximation of the subject matter, a serviceable illusion of life. Stephen King has said, "Fiction is the truth inside the lie." Preserving the truth embedded in fiction should be the primary goal of writing and translating. Poets and authors strive to wring more from words than their dry definitions strictly allow. Certain combinations and juxtapositions create a result that exceeds the sum of the parts. "She walks in beauty like the night," conjures something special beyond the face value of the individual words.

A skilled writer pays attention to nuances of words, narrow shades of meaning, deft subtleties of expression, to convey a desired impression. An effective translator does not merely provide equivalent words in a new language – an effective translator seeks to convey the same impression in a new language. The required adjustments from the phrasing in the native language may be extreme, and rely on discerning insight and ingenuity from the translator. Inevitably, when a story is translated into a new language, additional fidelity from the original vision is lost. Only a human can make educated decisions on what can be lost in translation,

***Brandon Mull** is #1 New York Times bestselling author of the 'Fablehaven' series and many other novels.*

Brandon Mull
Photo: Private archive

what must be preserved, and what can and should be added in order to stay true to the author's intentions. I have found that the best large language models can simulate a reasonably competent writer, though the style and originality tend to be generic if not cliché. But let's imagine that in the future, programmers work out all the bugs, allowing AI to convincingly imitate human writers. Do we want the study of the human heart and mind carried out by trained machines?

A perceptive and talented human writer struggles to distill aspects of the human experience into words. Much is lost in the process. But how much more is lost when a computer program mimics the efforts of a human writer? Are we interested in lessons about humanity from a program with no human experiences? Could an AI program offer original and authentic insights? Can it do anything beyond spitting out remixes of the authentic perceptions and experiences of others, stitched together like Frankenstein's monster, having a semblance of animation with no actual life?

Good writing is largely about honesty. Since AI is not human, the best it can do is fake humanity. The ability to synthesize viewpoints and styles from a wide variety of sources makes even the best AI nothing more than an accomplished hack, a talented fraud.

As with writing, so with translation. I want a human translator working to preserve whatever value exists in my stories. My best hope for successfully bridging my work into another language lies in gifted translators using their best judgment to figure out how to preserve the impressions I am trying to convey. If we take the humanity out of the writing and sharing of stories, we lose most of what stories have to offer. As a matter of principle, we should demand thinking, feeling humans as the custodians of truth inside of fiction.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

What's new on the "unlikely frontier"?

Recent research on AI for literary translation

Waltraud Kolb

Academic research on literary MT[1] has picked up pace since the mid-2010s on both sides of what Miguel Jiménez-Crespo[2] has recently called the "unlikely frontier", the meeting point of technology/computational linguistics and literary translation studies. Indeed, a dialogue between the two disciplines is getting underway, with researchers starting to take note of each other's work and interdisciplinary projects being initiated.

How to evaluate machine translations?

One central concern for both fields is MT quality and how to evaluate it. Automatic metrics, which compare MT output with human reference translations, are widely used, as they are much faster and less costly than manual evaluation. However, they do not allow for an in-depth assessment of literary translations, and recent studies tend to rely also (or exclusively) on manual evaluation, sometimes supplemented with corpus-linguistic analysis. Manual evaluation is a painstaking process of identifying and categorising MT errors and shortcomings; for literary texts, a number of taxonomies have been developed which take into account not just accuracy and fluency, as commonly used in non-literary contexts, but also features such as text-level coherence, cohesion, cultural references, style, or register.

For some language pairs, researchers have trained MT systems with huge amounts of literary texts (for example, Antonio Toral and Andy Way did a study published in 2018 where they used over 100 million words of literary text to train their English-to-Catalan engine), and such literary-adapted systems have indeed been found to outperform general-domain engines such as Google Translate. Another avenue that has been

[1] The term 'literary MT' is certainly controversial, as it might not only be read as MT of literature but also as MT output that has literary qualities of its own.

[2] All references mentioned in this article and a list of suggestions for further reading can be found here.

explored more recently is 'personalising' MT by training generic systems not so much with a large corpus of different literary texts but rather with texts by one particular author and translator.

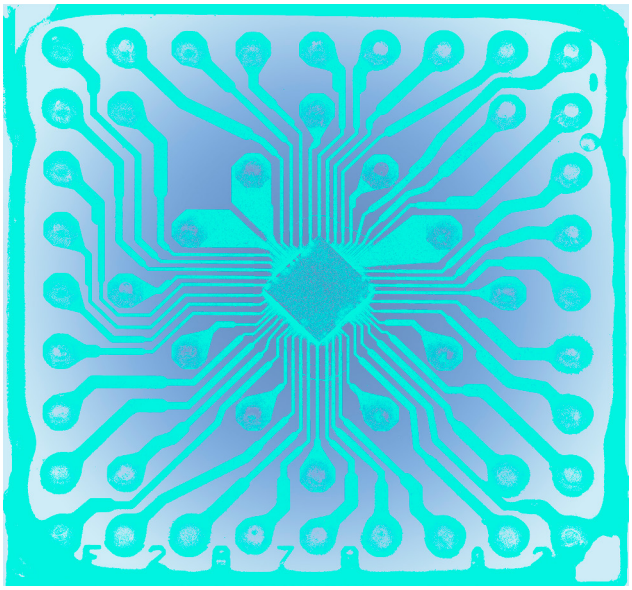
However, results regarding the performance of specific MT systems are difficult to compare as they depend on the study design and many variables, not least who the evaluators are: native speakers without a translation background, translation students, or professional (literary) translators? 'Success rates' indicating how much of the MT output is considered acceptable therefore vary quite a bit, with numbers frequently ranging between 30% and 40%. At the same time, studies have also revealed that literary post-editors hardly leave a sentence generated by MT untouched and tend to go well beyond achieving accuracy and fluency. Areas that are known to still pose a particular challenge to MT systems include context awareness, cohesion, reference, especially beyond sentence boundaries, ambiguity and polysemy, style, register, rare or unknown words, orthographically similar words, literalism, and omissions. Of course, research to improve the quality of MT in all these areas is ongoing.

How efficient is post-editing?

Raw MT output invariably needs to be post-edited, therefore the impact of different post-editing modalities on post-editing quality and user-friendliness are being explored. Apart from traditional post-editing or using a CAT-tool environment for post-editing, various forms of interactive post-editing are being investigated. An example is DeepL, which displays alternative options for a word or phrase and automatically updates the rest of the text if such an alternative is clicked on; other interactive systems react to what the translator types in and then come up with translation completion proposals in real-time, which can be accepted or rejected. So far, no modality has emerged as clearly superior to others.

Regarding productivity gains of post-editing over human translation, findings are not clear-cut either. While many studies find that post-editing is faster than human translation, we need to account for the fact that they usually take place in research settings, which might skew results. Also, there is great inter-subject variation when it comes to working speed, and issues such as MT quality or working contexts also have a bearing.

The few real-life studies that we have so far on publication projects involving post-editing show that scenarios can differ considerably.



By Kaisa Ranta, based on a photo by Mister_fr *CC-SA*

In a 2022 study by Lieve Macken and colleagues of the workflow used by a book-translation company, a Dutch MT of an English literary source text was first post-edited by a professional literary translator and, as a second step, revised (mainly monolingually) by a different translator. In this two-pronged approach, the post-editor seemed to have chiefly been responsible for correcting MT errors, while the reviser's task then was to make the text more readable and acceptable for the target audience, with more edits actually made by the reviser than by the post-editor.

> *"More edits were actually made by the reviser than by the post-editor"*

In one of my own studies earlier this year, I also investigated a real-life post-editing project, in this case a translation via post-editing from Brazilian-Portuguese into German. Here, the workflow was very different, with the post-editor being responsible for all aspects of the final product, much like a translator in a traditional scenario. It therefore did not come as a surprise that the post-editing process in this case was far from a fluent and straightforward affair, comprising at least six full-text (plus a number of partial) editing rounds. To compare post-editing with human translation, effort is also measured in terms of keystrokes and pauses. Post-editing can be expected to require fewer keystrokes to type in content, but more use of navigation and erase keys. Similarly, process studies indicate that there are fewer pauses made in post-editing than in human translation. As pauses are commonly associated with cognitive effort, it would follow that post-editing is less cognitively demanding.

The cognitive effort involved in post-editing is certainly something that needs to be explored in more depth and in real-life contexts, as some literary translators experience post-editing as more demanding and tiring than human translation (cf. feedback provided by participants in a recent German study initiated from within the community of literary translators).

Pause patterns can also be analysed with a view to creativity, as pauses are often linked to a period in a cognitive process in which a creative idea is being incubated. In a 2022 study on creativity in post-editing and human translation, Ana Guerberof-Arenas and Antonio Toral confirmed such a correlation between the number of pauses and the number of creative solutions in the target text – both were higher in human translation than in post-editing.

Do machine-generated translations speak post-editese?

An interesting question is whether post-edited texts exhibit certain linguistic features that set them apart from human translations (so-called post-editese). A number of such features have indeed been uncovered, e.g., more standard vocabulary, less lexical diversity and density, more standard and simpler syntax, more interference from the original – in other words, traces of unedited MT output or echoes of what Gys-Walt van Egdom

and Joke Daems in an article from 2021 call MT's "mechanical voice".

Such traces are also a result of MT priming effects. In a study, in which I compared how five literary translators translated a short story by Hemingway into German and five others post-edited a DeepL version, priming in post-editing occurred not only on the level of semantics and syntax, where we might expect it, but also in the interpretation of whole scenes in the narrative.

While in human translation, translators construct the meaning of words, phrases and scenes from scratch as they read the original, the MT already presents them with a ready-made interpretation, which post-editors tend not to question unless faced with an obvious error or inconsistency. As one result, the post-edited versions of Hemingway's story turned out more similar to each other than the translations made by human translators.

Priming effects thus have a substantial impact on the extent to which a translator's or post-editor's personal style or voice is present in a target text, and studies have shown that it is less manifest in post-edited texts than in human translations. One such study by Dorothy Kenny and Marion Winters, published in 2020, was presented in some detail in *Counterpoint* No. 4 by Hans-Christian Oeser, the translator who participated in it [insert link 3]. In a follow-up study of a real-life translation via post-editing of a full novel by the same translator the focus was not so much on the loss of personal style in post-editing but rather on ways in which a translator can assert his voice to a certain degree through his edits (Winters and Kenny 2023).

In any case, Hans-Christian Oeser's remark that he intends to use MT in the future "only to spot-check and not over a wide area of text" is very much in line with feedback from participants in other studies, who in most cases say they prefer translating from scratch, feel primed by the MT draft and constrained in their creativity, and find post-editing cognitively and emotionally draining. At the same time, though, they also acknowledge that the MT output can occasionally serve as a source of inspiration.

When it comes to the use of translation technology by literary translators, surveys indicate that CAT-tools are used to some extent, especially by translators who work with them routinely in non-literary contexts. Not so MT. In a survey by Paola Ruffo, carried out in 2018 and published in 2022, only ten out of 150 respondents from 35 countries stated that they use MT or had used it at least once for a literary translation job (compared to 38 mentions of CAT tools), but this number will probably have risen over the last five years. Apart from MT, researchers have also looked into potential benefits of other CALT tools (CALT standing for 'computer-assisted literary translation', a term coined by a team of researchers at the University in Swansea), such as corpus tools for text analysis, text visualisation software, or tools assisting in the translation of puns and wordplay.

What do readers think?

How are texts produced in different modalities read by the target audience?

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Waltraud Kolb
Photo: Private archive

So far, data shows that it takes readers longer to read an MT version of a whole novel than a human translation, probably due to MT errors – an eye-tracking study tracing the impact of certain types of errors on the reading process is still ongoing (Colman et al. 2022). MT has also been found to rank lower than post-editing, human translation and originals when it comes to narrative engagement, enjoyment and translation reception. However, results seem to vary with languages: in a 2023 article, Guerberof-Arenas and Toral report that in their reception study Catalan readers clearly preferred human translation to the other modalities, while Dutch readers seemed to prefer post-editing over human translation, the (English) original scoring highest for engagement and enjoyment.

The impact of AI on literary translation has grown into a very active field of research, and only a few topics of interest have been mentioned here; others that come to mind are the use of ChatGPT, the use of machine-translated bilingual e-books by second-language learners, MT of neologisms or metaphors – or, importantly, ethical issues of AI use, such as authors' and translators' rights, transparency and accountability, environmental implications, or long-term impacts on language and translatorial skills. It remains to be seen what new encounters on this "unlikely frontier" will yield.

Two new interdisciplinary research projects will address a number of aspects of AI in literary translation, including current technological needs of literary translators.

The project ***Narrative Text, Translator and Machine: In Search of User-Friendly Translation Technology for Literary Texts*** will be led by Kristiina Taivalkoski-Shilov and funded by the Academy of Finland. The EU-funded project ***Uncovering the Creative Process: From Inception to Reception of Translated Content Using Machine Translation*** will be led by Ana Guerberof-Arenas.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

WRITERS ON AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

On being translated by machines

David Diop

In his book entitled *The Myth of Singularity: Do We Have Anything to Fear from Artificial Intelligence?*, Jean-Gabriel Ganascia[1], chairman of the CNRS national ethics committee in France, concludes that there is no comparison between human and artificial intelligence. Ganascia refutes the arguments of the Cassandras who predict that machines will take control of humanity on an imminent doomsday, something he considers highly unlikely. In his opinion, "there is no direct link between the computing power of machines and their ability to simulate intelligence." Or to put it another way, human intelligence has no equal. Machines can be deceptive, especially when it comes to translating everyday phrases from one language into another, as is the case with the applications on our mobile phones. So, while a machine can handle this kind of simple translation, the complexity of translating a literary work is beyond its reach. As the poet Mallarmé wrote, poetry and literature do not generally use language as an instrument for simple communication, "as one might silently take or put a coin in someone else's hand"[2]. The utilitarian "basic use of speech" can never be equated with the "essential" language of literature. Literature orchestrates surprises in language. The evocative power of banal words that readers don't pay much attention to in their own everyday speech comes from their unheard-of arrangement never before expressed in the written word, which is thus able to reveal their innermost thoughts, feelings and sensations.

If there is one field in which artificial intelligence is doomed to be relegated far behind human intelligence, I believe it is literary translation. It goes without saying that machines have no thoughts

[1] Jean-Gabriel Ganascia, *Le mythe de la Singularité. Faut-il craindre l'intelligence artificielle?* Paris, Seuil, collection Points, 2019, p. 53.

[2] Stéphane Mallarmé, "Avant-dire" for *Traité du Verbe* by René Ghil, 1886.

***David Diop** was born in Paris in 1966 and grew up in Senegal. A professor of eighteenth-century Literature at the University of Pau in south-west France, his work explores European representations of Africa. His novel* Frère d'âme *garnered the 2018 Goncourt des Lycéens and the International Booker Prize in 2021. His latest novel,* La porte du voyage sans retour, *was a finalist for the National Books Awards 2023.*

David Diop
Photo: Eric Traversié

of their own, no feelings or intimate sensations. They can only simulate them artificially, and therefore only produce bad literary translations.

> ***"To put it another way, human intelligence has no equal"***

In this respect, I consider particularly enlightening the words of Antoine Berman in *The Experience of the Foreign*: "A bad translation I call the translation which, generally under the guise of transmissibility, carries out a systematic negation of the strangeness of the foreign work[3]". Since machines do not experience the psycho-sensory effects of the literary text they are decoding, and are content to seek only its 'transmissibility', they are incapable of translating into another language 'the strangeness of the foreign work', that is to say, its true beauty.

Translated from the French by Penny Eades-Alvarez

[3] Antoine Berman, *L'Épreuve de l'étranger : culture et traduction dans l'llemagne romantique*. Paris, Gallimard, "Tel", 1984, p. 17.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

Copyright in light of generative AI

Gregor Strojin

Inputs and outputs

In September 2023 a group of prominent authors, including George RR Martin and John Grisham, filed a lawsuit at the federal court in Manhattan, New York, against OpenAI, creators of ChatGPT, claiming their copyright was infringed to train the system and accusing them of "systematic theft on a mass scale." Similarly, during the course of this year, digital artists sued developers of image generators Midjourney and Stability AI for training their models on their graphic work, and there were also lawsuits by programmers who allege their code was used in a similar manner by Microsoft, OpenAI and others in training Copilot, an artificial intelligence (AI) tool used to assist in code writing.

The rapid development of AI over the past few years has spurred the need for social rules and society to adapt to the new reality, both due to impact and disruptions on the existing positions, and the second-order effects which require reevaluations of feasibility of legal and economic regimes which formed the existing rules in the first place. Some of these issues relate also to copyright and other intellectual property protection mechanisms.

Initially, most discussions on the reevaluation of Intellectual Property (IP) legal frameworks have been devoted to protecting AI systems themselves, their products and their outputs. Questions regarding output include: are works made by AI copyrightable, if so, who owns the copyright, what is the level of human input required to satisfy the threshold for creative input, or even, can AI systems be considered authors and awarded copyright protection?

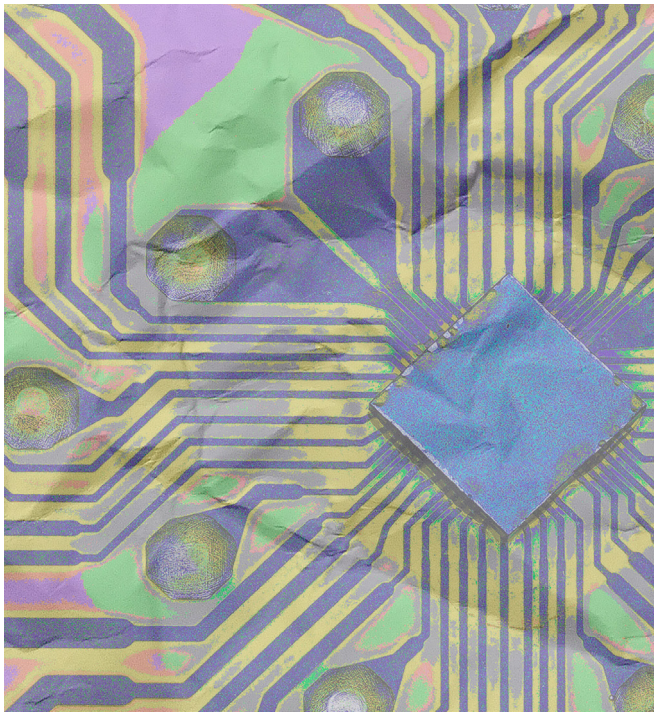
The recent proliferation of a new generation of technology, generative AI, has strengthened the salience of such questions but also sheds light on the opposite perspective. Many ambiguities were made visible on the other side of the equation i.e. in the input data used for training.

The former issues regarding output primarily address the potential rights stemming from the novel uses of the technology. The latter issues regarding input address the interests and rights

of existing human authors. The former group of issues shares many similarities with discussions relating to the benefits and potentials of the new technology and is often advocated by the same representatives of the wider tech community. Representatives of the latter group are typically fragmented and often unaware of their role in the dynamics of technology development, and at best, in a defensive role. These positions appear to be reflected in parallel legislative initiatives as well.

What makes generative AI so special?

AI as a technology depends on three key components: data, algorithms, and computing power. Although AI has evolved through various forms since the mid-20th century, it has gained unprecedented momentum in the past decade mainly due to the exponential growth in the amount of available data.



By Kaisa Ranta, based on a photo by Mister_fr *CC-SA*

The increasing digitisation of our lives contributes to more data being created every two years than humanity has produced in its entire history prior to that. Texts, images, sounds, videos, our use of mobile and other electronic devices, and the signals received by sensors on cars and various other devices can all be used as input for training AI models. Data represents an extremely broad category and also includes more complex information, such as unstructured documents and other works, including literary writings. It is the main ingredient in the development of AI models, and the fuel for their further growth.

Algorithms are methods of processing such data. They are abstract methods, which means that they cannot be directly protected by intellectual property mechanisms such as copyrights or patents, and the ability to use them primarily depends on available knowledge or human resources.

Many algorithms used in artificial intelligence systems have been known and used in statistics for a long time. Nevertheless, there have been significant advances in processing methods over the last decade. Initially requiring supervised training of pre-arranged data, machine learning abilities have progressed through large neural networks and generative adversarial networks toward advanced capabilities that allow self-supervised learning on previously unprocessed data. This, however, requires speed.

Fast processing of large amounts of training data allows neural networks to identify connections and relations

between all data elements in the network, recognise patterns, dependencies and statistical regularities often hidden to humans, and learn from them directly. This is used to develop parameters, which are essentially variables determined from the given training data. Eventually, they function as detailed instructions on how to use algorithms in connection with particular input data within set degrees of probability, decoding it and encoding new outputs. Through this, pre-trained models are created, which can be used for various types of tasks and fine-tuned further to create original and diverse content and synthesise data that resembles the examples from which they were trained.

Efficient training and running of such systems largely depends on their computing or processing capacities. In comparison with data, the capacities of processors are growing relatively more linear, as they are limited by many physical laws - from the size and speed of the chips to the geostrategic implications of their manufacturers' locations, which influence their availability and, consequently, competitiveness. In addition to this, they also consume substantial energy and human resources for setting up, running, cooling and maintenance. As they significantly depend on the available financial resources, they influence concentrations of large model development.

Increasing capacities of all three components allow for the creation of ever larger and more powerful pre-trained models, whose complexity is often expressed in the number of parameters and dataset size. For example, while the first version of OpenAI's GPT was based on 117 million parameters, having been trained on a dataset of about 4.6 GB of raw text, and the second 1.5 billion with a dataset of 40 GB of filtered text, version GPT3 already used 175 billion parameters with a dataset of 570 GB filtered from 45 TB of plaintext. Interestingly, information on the GPT4's parameter size was never formally disclosed but is estimated at 1.7 trillion, and the dataset size and provenance remain unknown.

> *"Advances in natural language processing allow for human-like quality levels of translation"*

Growth of parameters above a certain critical point seems to trigger unexpected emergent abilities, which are not present at a smaller volume. This has, among many other functionalities, led to significant advances in natural language processing, allowing for human-like quality levels of translation, summarisation, stylisation, and overall content generation.

Access to data without burden

While algorithms, computing power and their utilisation are generally freely available on the market and depend mostly on monetary resources, data is often exclusive and subject to various

restrictions, depending on its source and protection mechanisms that may apply. The provenance and legality of the materials used for high-volume and high-quality datasets for training and especially fine-tuning AI models are relevant questions. It seems, however, that the lack of developers' transparency makes it difficult, if not impossible, to answer them satisfactorily.

The importance of data, with priority on accessibility and availability, has been at the forefront of European legislators for many years. Such an approach has contributed, among other measures, to new rules for free access to data through different legal instruments, especially in the public sector with requirements for re-use of its data. Recently, this was also expanded to private individuals, as stipulated by the newly applicable Data Governance Act, which encourages data altruism. The aim was to provide as much data as possible for development, stressing the importance of facilitating access to data and data sharing, open standards and open-source technology to encourage investment and boost innovation.

The revision of the EU copyright directive is an example of another such measure, as it introduced an important exception to the previously strong and exclusive rights of copyright holders and significantly expanded the ability of data users to process previously protected material through an opt-out principle. As an EU Commission Study on copyright and new technologies noted in 2022, "The use of protected content as AI-training data may involve certain protected acts, which require the rightsholders prior consent – unless they are exempted under one of the copyright exceptions. The newly introduced exceptions for text and data mining (TDM) may relieve the developers and users of AI solutions in the cultural sector of this burden [*sic*]."

The opt-out principle, for example, allows copyright holders to reserve their rights in light of the newly introduced TDM exception, but the process and effectiveness of this remain unclear. The Commission Study did acknowledge, that (*inter alia*) it may prove difficult to verify compliance with the opt-out, as TDM processes are mostly invisible to the public, carried out without prior information, and there is no obvious legal basis to request access to the process or to force the AI solution provider to demonstrate that the protected content has not been used.

Another illustrative demonstration of how policymakers understand and assess such data can be seen in the progress of the currently negotiated EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AIA). The European Commission's original proposal from April 2021 touched on copyright only in passing, and even then in the context of the protection of the developers' IP rights. The Council of the EU also did not take a more specific view of it in November 2022. Significantly, however, it did introduce a new category of 'general AI', which would be subject to a significant reduction of the expected compliance obligations. The European Parliament's position in June 2023 may have had a certain advantage of hindsight since it was formulated after the public's exposure to generative tools in late 2022 and early 2023. Consequently, the Parliament

envisaged significantly higher compliance requirements for a new category of 'foundation models',which could, otherwise, easily fall within the Council's 'general AI' category as a subset. Among many other new requirements proposed for foundation models, transparent information on the copyrighted data used in AI models' training particularly stands out.

> *"Many issues relating to AI's impact on creative work may not belong in the domain of copyright"*

Whether such obligations for foundation models will actually be used in the final text of the upcoming Regulation remains to be seen. The trialogues, the final phase of the negotiations, are currently underway and are expected to conclude by the end of this year (2023). The differences in the initial approaches of the three key institutions point both to the rapid changes in the technological field, and this makes it difficult for legislators to foresee all the implications in time and demand the agility and adaptability of the appropriate legal framework. They also indicate the complexity of the interests and relationships of all stakeholders in the long chain of new technologies.

These changes also indicate the need to reevaluate some of the principles related to TDM. Increasing the levels of legal access for TDM indeed provides an important ingredient for emerging technology, but its second-order effects, primarily the eventual disruptions in the creative industries and culture, might indicate a costly imbalance. The problem echoes one of the findings of the Ad Hoc Committee on AI at the Council of Europe (CAHAI), which assessed the feasibility of a legal framework for the design, development and use of AI in line with standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law (and whose successor, Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI) is currently negotiating an international treaty on AI). While we do not have a legal vacuum when it comes to AI, procedural and substantive gaps in current legal frameworks limit the effective protection and enforcement of existing rights due to the specifics of the new technologies. Similarly, the rights of the existing copyright holders may seem protected in substance but are, in fact, limited in actual scope or effective procedural enforcement mechanisms. The impacts of AI clearly show the need to reevaluate the efficiency and balance of the existing rules.

Issues beyond copyright

Many questions raised by the lawsuits against generative AI developers go beyond the scope of copyright law. The style of a particular artist or facts presented in the works are traditionally not protected by copyright, yet they are important themes of contentions. Automated generation of similar works

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Gregor Strojin
Photo: Private archive

impacts authors' interests and society. Generative AI can, for example, change a text's style by using techniques such as style transfer and text synthesis, effectively bypassing many protected aspects of individual copyrighted work. As generative AI produces works that can often be indistinguishable from the work created by humans, it can be and already is used as an adequate substitute in some areas that primarily depend on creativity and originality of the output rather than its quality. After all, quality may just as well be a matter of subjective taste, or something that can be evaluated on the basis of measuring feedback from content providers' end users. This effectively disrupts not only the underlying business models of the creators of the works which were used for training the AI models but can eventually displace human-authored content on a much larger scale, affecting culture.

Centuries ago, modernising societies started developing intellectual property regimes as incentives for creating and disseminating knowledge, innovation and creativity attuned to particular economic policies and philosophies, primarily humanism. As legal constructs, they can significantly differ between countries. Even more importantly, they are also subject to periodical changes. They adapt over time as technology progresses, and are bound to do so in the future. However, the direction of future legislative changes is always uncertain, and can just as well depend on principles or on different perceptions, priorities and lobbying abilities.

In a public response to the pending lawsuits, OpenAI said it respected the right of authors, and "believed they should benefit from AI technology". That does not seem to answer the plaintiffs' claims either directly or indirectly, but the benefit from AI is an important notion. Many issues regarding AI's impact on creative work, or work otherwise, may not belong in the domain of copyright or intellectual property. However, they do raise questions on what future incentives for creativity and innovation should be, how they might be balanced between stakeholders, who will benefit from the AI, in what share, and, not to be overlooked, at what cost.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

WRITERS ON AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

AI and 'small' languages

Lavinia Braniște

My books have so far been translated into three languages, and each time the process started with a passionate and enthusiastic translator who discovered the book, translated a sample and then started knocking on publishers' doors. That's something a robot couldn't do.

Romanian is a 'small' language, our literature is not very well known abroad and is not of interest to foreign publishers, so it needs 'ambassadors' who are the translators. I'm a translator myself (but as I work from 'big' languages into Romanian, I am not needed as an ambassador), so I can well understand the effort it takes to find a publisher who is interested in seemingly obscure books. My intuition is that translators don't necessarily enjoy this stage of their work, but as we Romanian authors don't work with agents and our institutions don't put much effort into promoting our books abroad, human translators are and will be indispensable for a long time to come.

As the quality of AI translation into and out of Romanian isn't very good, I'm not too afraid of it – for now. However, it's amazing how fast technology is advancing and how fast software is improving, so we'll probably have to face this prospect at some stage.

In relation to the translation of my books into other languages – I wouldn't mind if the translator used AI, as long as they then went through the text again and again until they found the human voice in the original (after all, machine translation software is a more efficient dictionary, working at sentence level, not word level). However, I would like to know if the publisher used AI directly and then, after no more than a rushed, cursory proofreading, put the book on the market.

I don't think robots are something abstract, existing independently of the people who create or use them. It seems to me that in recent discussions about AI

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Lavinia Braniște
Photo: Adi Bulboacă

there's a lot of talk about robots and the ethics of whether translators should or should not use these tools, but we should also think about the non-translators in the chain, those people who created the robots and who profit from their use.

I must admit that I haven't had much time to think about copyright and profit-sharing issues in the use of AI. I'm a freelance writer and translator, I have many collaborations and many battles to fight on my own, and I don't know where another fight could fit in my professional life right now. For me, the translation of my books abroad is more a matter of portfolio than profit, and the biggest gain has actually been befriending the translators.

SPECIAL FEATURE: AI AND LITERARY TRANSLATION

AI and minoritised languages

Some personal considerations

Miquel Cabal Guarro

In the last six months I have had the chance to participate in two online panels related to AI and translation on behalf of CEATL. The first panel, organised by the Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee of PEN International (TLRC-PEN) , was devoted to *Technology and language diversity*. The second panel had the rather disturbing title of *What use the Humanities without human*, with a slightly more illuminating subtitle: *the value of human interpreting and human translation in a fragile world*, and was organised by the International Federation of Translators (FIT).

In the context of the preparation of these panels and the discussions they provoked I was prompted to contemplate various questions and concerns that resonate with two significant dimensions of my identity and profession. These dimensions are intricately intertwined, and it is nearly impossible to separate one from the other when considering the array of inquiries that emerged from these panels. Consequently, I aim to address these questions from a dual perspective, drawing upon my experiences both as a professional in the field of literary translation and as a speaker of, and translator into, a minoritised language.

Lack of accountability

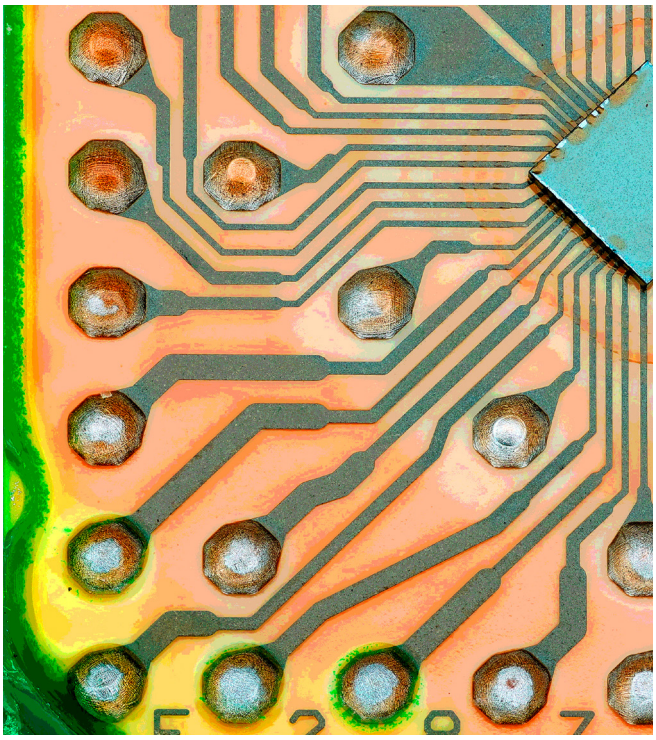
As a professional in the field of literary translation, I am particularly concerned about a specific aspect of AI applications in translation: their ethical implications. The rapid development of AI has occurred without a comprehensive ethical framework. AI researchers have been advancing their technology without sufficiently questioning the moral and societal implications of their achievements. The undervaluing of humanities and the arts as essential components of education and everyday life may be a contributing factor to the absence of ethical boundaries in AI research.

One of the key ethical issues with AI translation is the lack of accountability. Machines are not capable of justifying their choices in a given translation: they operate on the basis of consensus and compromise between various possibilities, and are often guided by mere frequency logic with the addition of a similar context. In contrast, human literary translators are always accountable for their choices, grounding their translations in the complexities of reality. While machines may indeed serve instrumental and utilitarian purposes in translation, the question arises: why would anyone prefer a machine-generated text over a human literary text, except for economic considerations? It is difficult to fathom any ethical argument that supports this preference.

I am fully aware of the potential advantages inherent in the deployment of neural processors for the analysis, summarisation, and generation of solutions in textual contexts. However, when we consider the broader macro dimension, it becomes evident that the need for regulatory frameworks and explicit ethical guidelines is paramount. The development and implementation of strong regulations under the guidance of explicit and even more robust ethical considerations can help strike a balance between technological advancement and responsible utilisation, ultimately promoting the greater good. Which is the common objective that should guide us in these distressing times.

Digital diglossia

Secondly, as a speaker of a minoritised language or, to put it in the eminent



By Kaisa Ranta, based on a photo by Mister_fr ***CC-SA***

sociolinguist Joshua Fishman's words, as a member of a "contextually weaker language community"[1], there are key considerations regarding AI and translation that I would like to stress. The latest advancements in language technology are poised to give rise to what is termed *digital diglossia*. This concept characterises a scenario in which speakers of minoritised languages tend to prefer the dominant languages of their regions in their interactions with search engines, apps, AI interfaces, and various other machine-driven systems involving human languages. Maite Melero, one of the Catalan researchers of this area, argues that "bilingual speakers of a regional language and a global language, rather than missing the digital train, will opt for the larger language and set

[1] Fishman, Joshua A. (2006), *Do not leave your language alone*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 90.

aside that which does not play a part in technological progress". Digital diglossia has already been observed in recent research conducted on non-hegemonic languages such as Catalan[2] and it has been widely documented for a number of other European languages in a comprehensive project about digital language equality, led and coordinated by the ADAPT Centre of Dublin City University and the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI) in Berlin.

> *"The discussion around AI should provoke deep ethical questions"*

The findings of this research are of particular relevance to the field of literary translation. In summary:

"Our results reiterate that digital language inequality poses a direct threat to Europe's linguistic and cultural diversity. Europe has become or is about to become a continent where digital diglossia is the de facto context for many EU citizens, with the exception of English native speakers. When going about their online lives, EU citizens too often find it more efficient or even absolutely necessary to rely on other, more widely supported languages (predominantly English) for certain services and information because this gives them greater access to high-quality and reliable content to a broader audience, and allows them to use more advanced technologies. This is true particularly for the younger generations, thus increasing the generational language gap and bringing lesser-resourced languages ever closer to digital extinction."[3]

As the authors point out in the quote, the prevalence of this diglossic behaviour, which has been observed and has been growing within the arts, sciences and business since the digital era of globalisation started, will of course contribute to the reduction of language diversity and accentuate inequalities between cultural communities. This phenomenon affects all non-world-wide hegemonic languages, from Tagalog to Danish, from Quechua to Italian. It is a matter that affects the vast majority of languages which Europeans speak, for example. Therefore, it is imperative to address these matters from political, social and especially ethical standpoints.

Digital extinction

It seems undeniable that the digital extinction of many (the majority, in fact) of our languages could create a highly precarious scenario within the literary milieu. With the continued development of AI translation tools as observed in recent years, it is foreseeable that digitally strong languages (in contrast to digitally extinct or nearly extinct languages) will inevitably evolve into bridge languages for a wide array of language combinations. And this

[2] The results of a recent survey show, for example, that "almost 45.0% of Catalan speakers in Catalonia do not use Catalan to search on sites such as Google and YouTube".

[3] Giagkou, Maria et al.

***Miquel Cabal Guarro** is a literary translator from Russian to Catalan and lecturer in Literary Translation and Russian Literature at the University of Barcelona. He has a PhD in Sociolinguistics and specialises in Slavic philology. He has published over forty translations of works by Dostoevsky, Dovlatov, Alexievich, and Platonov. He was awarded the 2021 Barcelona City Prize for the translation of Dostoevsky's* Crime and Punishment. *He is treasurer of CEATL and is also a member of the board of the Association of Writers in Catalan Language (AELC).*

Miquel Cabal Guarro
Photo: Joana de Querol

will terminate the direct interchange between many linguocultural communities, which will be connected to other communities solely through the filter of the dominant and digitally stronger language of their region.

Even for those who translate from or into one of the few globally hegemonic languages, this discussion should provoke deep ethical questions about the use, misuse and potential development of AI and its applications within the literary domain, specifically in the context of literary translation.

As advocates of diversity, literary translators bear the moral duty to combat any kind of cultural abuse. So, let's maintain a watchful eye on AI while continuing to infuse our translations with human creativity. For the common good.

This article was written in 2023 with the support of a research grant from the Catalan government.

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: ICELAND

THOT (Þot)

A small association with a big heart

Guðrún Catherine Emilsdóttir

Next year, Bandalag þýðenda og túlka (The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters – THOT) will celebrate its 20th anniversary. While for many comparable associations in Europe this may not seem particularly noteworthy, for a country with Iceland's small population of around 390,000, it is quite an accomplishment, especially for an association run by unpaid volunteers. THOT was founded by Gauti Kristmannsson and several other sector professionals. Gauti, who served as its first chair until 2009, is currently a Professor of Translation Studies at the University of Iceland and remains active within the association.

Times change, focal issues remain

Reflecting on the association's origins and comparing them to its current status is enlightening. THOT was established in response to a growing and dispersed number of translators and interpreters, who were either embedded in various companies or working as independent contractors with minimal networking opportunities. The vision was to create an umbrella organisation encompassing several smaller associations of translators (both literary and technical) and interpreters. This provided a platform for members to communicate, exchange ideas, and exercise collective influence on editors, companies and the government regarding issues pertinent to their field, such as rights (encompassing both authors'rights and general rights), quality, education, and visibility of translators. Notably, during the year 2004, there was a wage dispute between audiovisual translators and the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service, and larger companies were attempting to dominate the market with low-paid translations of DVD materials.

Two decades later, the association grapples with strikingly similar issues: visibility of translators and interpreters, wage disputes, and, intriguingly, large companies trying to control the market with low-paid translations of streaming materials, such as films, TV programmes and books. It's noteworthy how the 'invisible translator' syndrome is so deeply ingrained in society, rendering translators undervalued as vital contributors to culture.

Today, THOT has established itself as a socially responsible entity, fostering

productive collaborations with various organisations, such as the Writers' Union of Iceland (RSÍ), the Icelandic Book Publishers' Association, The University of Iceland, and the government. Our yearly activities predominantly involve organising events with translators, interpreters, and the academic community, often open to the general public. Highlights include the annual presentation of the Translation Awards for the best-translated literary fiction and the Icepick Award for the best-translated crime story. Every other year, the Honorary Award, Orðstír, is presented for translations of Icelandic literature into a foreign language.

Honorary Award Oristir 2023
Jacek Godek, Gauti Krismannsson,
Luciano Dutra
Photo: Guðrún C. Emilsdóttir

AI arrives in Iceland

Presently, THOT's most pressing issue, common to many European countries, is the proliferation and application of AI in the realms of creation and culture. Major companies like Storytel are beginning to approach Icelandic translators, requesting them to post-edit AI-generated translations for half the standard translation rates. Many translators have expressed their discontent regarding this development to us, and fortunately, we have not heard of any who have accepted such offers. News about this reached the media, sparking public discussions and social media debates, and leading to interviews with the chairs of both THOT and The Writers' Union.

We have voiced our concerns about the potential negative impacts of utilizing AI in literary translations, especially for a micro-language like Icelandic. Currently, THOT is drafting a statement opposing the use of AI in literary and audiovisual translations. In addition, following a well-attended conference about AI and copyright held by The Writers' Union in collaboration with artists' associations, THOT will organize a panel to further explore this issue in the near future.

***Guðrún Catherine Emilsdóttir** is the chair of THOT since 2019. She has been translating from French and English into Icelandic for about 30 years, mostly in the field of technical translations, but she has also translated children's books, comic books, philosophical articles and fiction books. She also works as community interpreter in the language pair French-Icelandic.*

Guðrún Catherine Emilsdóttir
Photo: Þiðrik Emilsson

Association info
Name: Bandalag þýðenda og túlka (Þot) (The Icelandic Association for Translators and Interpreters (THOT))
Founded: 30th September 2004
Number of members: 112, of which about 30% are working as literary translators
Protector of the association: Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, former president of Iceland

Iceland's capital Reykjavík is the home of two CEATL member organisations: Bandalag þýðenda og túlka (The Icelandic Association of Translators and Interpreters – THOT) and Rithöfundasamband Íslands (The Writers Union of Iceland – RSÍ). In Spring 2024, THOT will host the CEATL AGM there, with some help from RSÍ as well.

This gives us the opportunity to get a closer look at how things are done in Iceland. What do the Icelandic associations focus on? What are some of their highlights and current issues? The associations' CEATL delegates, Guðrún Catherine Emilsdóttir (THOT) and Þórunn Hafstað (RSÍ) tell us all.

NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: ICELAND

RSÍ

Raising awareness of the role of professional writers and translators in society

Þórunn Hafstað

The Writers Union of Iceland (Rithöfundasamband Íslands – RSÍ) is a professional rights holders' organisation and a trade union, representing authors and translators since 1974. One of its main roles is to safeguard Icelandic literature and language.

Out of 658 members of RSÍ, 11% are active translators. Because of the small number of union members, genres are not split into sections. Instead, the union represents all its members as a single section; poets, novelists, literary translators, audiovisual translators, dramatists, scriptwriters, writers of young adult/children's books and authors of academic works. It is a noticeable characteristic of RSÍ's members that most of them qualify for more than one professional category. In fact, the majority of Icelandic literary translators are writers as well.

Translators and interpreters do have their own professional association, THOT, which is a close collaborator of RSÍ. However, RSÍ alone handles all standard negotiations on behalf of translators. RSÍ also creates a reference rate for translators to take as guidance when the standard ones are not applicable. Nonetheless, this does not apply to technical translators and interpreters, who are not members of RSÍ.

Current issues facing RSÍ

One of the most pressing matters in current negotiations between RSÍ and the Icelandic Publishers' Association is to try to guarantee that translators get a share of royalties from publishers' contracts with subscription services for audio and e-books (e.g. Storytel).

The board and office staff of RSÍ
Photo: Valgarður Gíslason

***Þórunn Hafstað** is a Project Manager of RSÍ. As such, it is her responsibility to monitor translators' affairs and to be their main adviser on negotiations and other rights issues.*

Þórunn Hafstað
Photo: Yrsa Rocca Fannberg

The current agreement is from 2011 and does not include the distribution of translations through such services. The Union regards subscription services as a new kind of right of use, which is not specified in the current agreement and therefore must be negotiated. Publishers have not been forthcoming on the matter, and negotiations have been difficult. Storytel (Storyside) is the largest publisher of audio and e-books in Iceland. Despite being a member of the Icelandic Publishers Association, Storytel is offering translators half of RSÍ's lowest standard contract rate. Another big current concern is AI and the effects this new technology will have on translators' job environment in Iceland. In collaboration with other artists' associations, RSÍ recently organized a big conference on AI and the arts and literature in Iceland. The conference was very well attended and kick started a discussion on the importance of legislation about AI. RSÍ is eager to enter meaningful dialogue and to take part in advancing legislation on copyright issues in the age of AI.

Association info
Name: Rithöfundasamband Íslands (RSÍ) (The Writers Union of Iceland)
Founded: 1974
Number of members: 658, of which ca 11% are literary translators

CEATL's Click List

Links to the world of translation

Not without permission

In May 2023, Chinese Canadian writer, poet and translator Yilin Wang discovered that her translation of poems by Qiu Jin featured in the British Museum exhibition *China's Hidden Century: 1796–1912*. As reported by *The Guardian* newspaper, her translations appeared on signage, in a video presentation, and in a catalogue – without authorisation, credit or compensation. The museum's first response was to remove her translation and then the original texts. By July, Wang had managed to secure enough crowd funding to allow her to take legal action against the British Museum for copyright and moral rights. The case was settled with the Museum admitting having used Wang's translation without permission and subsequently reinstating her work in the exhibition. Of even wider significance, the case has highlighted the mostly invisible work of translators in exhibitions.

No to soulless translations

In September 2023, a "collective of translators working in the publishing, film and audiovisual fields" in France sent out a petition about the use of generative AI in literary translation under the heading 'En chair et en os' (literally 'in flesh and bones'), co-signed by a great number of prominent literary figures, including several Nobel Prize-winning writers.

Among the main points of the petition, the translators from this quite diverse field of cultural creation argue that the use of generative AI programmes "harms culture in general by standardising it while spreading biases" and that the "generative programmes are fed with existing human works, mined as simple

bulk data, without offering the authors the choice to give their consent or not". Thus, 'En chair et en os' wishes to gather voices behind some of the main issues of concern on the use of generative AI, and they emphasise the wider implications of not taking this matter seriously:

"What may appear as progress is actually leading to immense losses of expertise, cognitive skills, and intellectual capacity across all human societies."

By the time *Counterpoint* was published, almost 4,500 people had signed the petition, which may be read here in French, English, Spanish, Romanian and German. For further insight, see *Libération* newspaper's article on the collective and the petition itself.

Literary translation between imagination and 'botisation'

At CEATL's Annual General Meeting, held in Ljubljana (Slovenia) in May 2023, delegates listened to a panel discussion about generative AI. The panel was organised in close cooperation with the Slovenian Association of Literary Translators (DSKP).

Researchers Simon Krek and Špela Vintar, legal expert Gregor Strojin, and Cécile Deniard, ATLF delegate to CEATL, discusssed basic concepts and some of the dilemmas and pitfalls related to digital linguistics, machine translation, artificial intelligence and copyright. The panel was moderated by Katja Zakrajšek, who contributed with an article on the use of CAT Tools for *Counterpoint* #4.

To watch the video recording of the panel, please click here.

Ljubljana panel: Katja Zakrajšec, Gregor Strojin, Špela Vintar, Simon Krek, Cécile Deniard Photo: Domen Pal

Colophon

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