

No one, no language and no book left behind

CEATL takes action on AI

Francesca Novajra

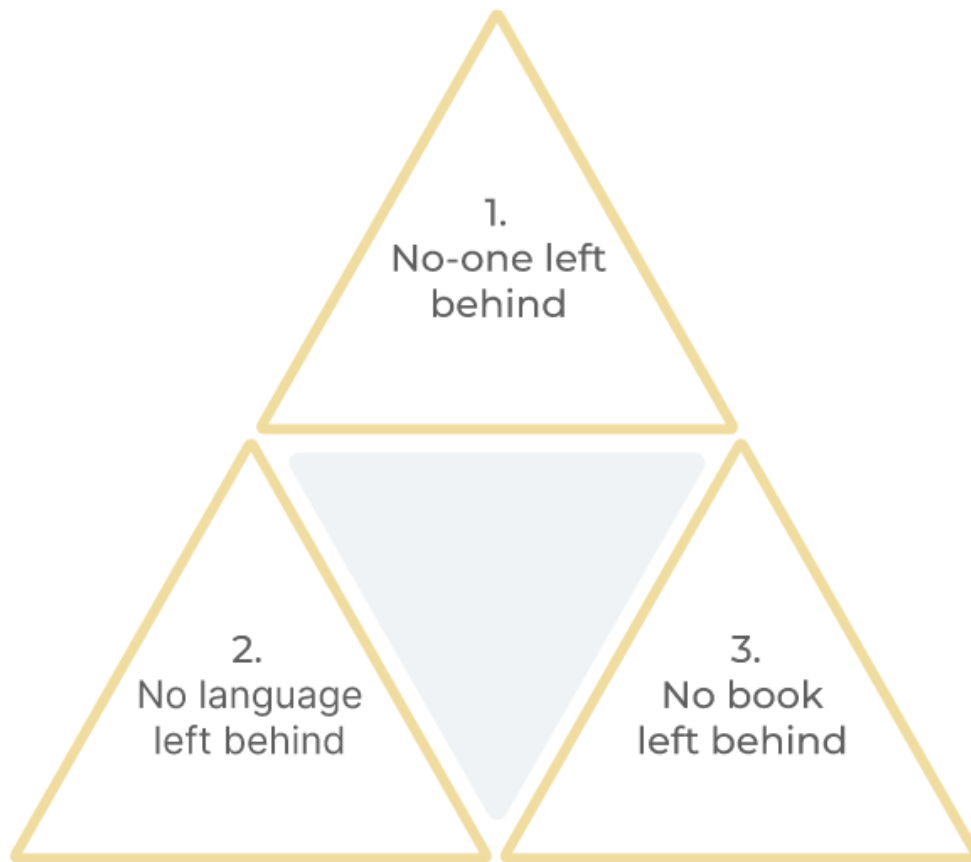
These last months, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become the subject of major interest and concern not only for literary translators but also for other artists. CEATL has been observing the impact of the rise of AI on the publishing industry and has carried out its own investigations into the issue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



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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.

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